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CLEANSING FIRES

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CLEANSING FIRES.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. NEWTON SEARS,

AUTHOR OF

"KISMET."

VOL. I.

(SECOND EDITION.)

London:
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CLEANSING FIRES.

Let thy gold be cast in the furnace,
  Thy red gold, precious and bright;
Do not fear the hungry fire,
  With its caverns of burning light.
And thy gold shall return more precious,
  Free from every spot and stain,
For gold must be tried by fire,
  As a heart must be tried by pain.

In the cruel fire of sorrow
  Cast thy heart, do not faint or wail,
Let thy hand be firm and steady,
  Do not let thy spirit quail;
But wait till the trial is over,
  And take thy heart again,
For as gold is tried by fire,
  So a heart must be tried by pain.

I shall know by the gleam and glitter
  Of the golden chain you wear,
By your heart's calm strength in loving
  Of the fire they have had to bear!
Beat on, true heart, for ever,
  Shine bright golden chain,
And bless the cleansing fires,
  And the furnace of living pain.

ADELAIDE A. PROCTOR.

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CLEANSING FIRES.

CHAPTER I.

"Isn't somebody, some one's darling?
Each heart has its number one."

It was a pleasant February day, the sky blue and clear overhead, flecked here and there with white fleecy clouds, the air mild and balmy. The clocks from St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, had just boomed the half hour after three, when Percy Stanhope, strolling leisurely along Pall Mall, turned into his club. Sounds of laughter fell upon his ear, as he pushed open the crimson baize door at the end of the long corridor, and for the moment he felt annoyed, for "The Travellers"

was usually deserted at that hour, and he did not feel in the humour for the babel that existed there occasionally.

"Halloa, Stanhope, what is the matter? you look like the latter end of a mis-spent life."

"That is Percy's normal condition," laughed another of the group of young men seated around a table; "his countenance is an everlasting reproach to his friends."

"Yes," chimed in a third, "I believe life is a continual regret to him."

The door swung to, and Percy Stanhope made his way across the richly carpeted room, saying, "no eulogiums, no eulogiums, I beg," with a gay wave of his hand, sinking into the only unoccupied chair, "I really am not in a fit condition to stand them. I haven't been in bed once this week before five o'clock, and its beginning to tell on me. But what are all you fellows about? have none of you anything to do at this time of day?" There was

no anger in his tone, only a lazy amusement beamed on his good looking face.

"I have been writing letters," said one, "and discharging a guilty conscience of its load."

"And I came to have a look at the newspapers," cried another, "only — well Bob, what is the fun?"

The young man addressed, looked up from "The Times," which so engrossed his attention, saying, "here's something spicy in the agony column!—listen—" reading aloud in a mocking tone—

"Nil desperandum! From Olympus to Hades! must positively see you this week—you will scarcely refuse—25-15-21-18-×12-9-20-20-12-5-×14-5-19-20-1 XX!"

"A happy blending of the tragic and ridiculous isn't it?"

"And intelligible," put in Percy Stanhope, "pass over the paper, Bob; let's see how much is due to your own imagination."

"There it is, large as life and twice as natural; I say, I wish I could decipher those hieroglyphics, and they don't look difficult either. I would give something to know who put that in."

Percy looked up, mildly astonished at the young man's energetic tone. "Why, what on earth has it to do with you?" he asked, "you have not been deceiving some fair damsel, eh?"

"Rubbish," retorted Bob Clinton shortly, "but it is an odd thing, 'Nil Desperandum' is Nugent Monroe's motto, and I shouldn't a bit wonder if this were meant for him."

A sceptical laugh greeted his remark. "Nugent Monroe! well Bob, you are drawing largely on your imagination, fancy any girl writing *billet-doux*, and making appointments in the daily papers with that piece of adamant. Why he is as cold as an icicle where women are concerned; I never heard his name coupled with a girl's in my life."

"There's no disputing that its his motto," replied the young man doggedly.

"Yes, but it is one, anybody who chooses can adopt; I don't know any phrase more common, than 'Nil desperandum.'"

For a moment Percy Stanhope bent over the paper, knitting his brows together, then he said quietly—

"I have deciphered the figures, at any rate, they are easy enough. Each one stands for the number of its letter—look—25 is Y, because that is the twenty fifth letter—and so on—so that it reads thus—

"Your little Nesta."

"Whew! that's cute of you Percy—as the Yankees would say—but I don't think we are much nearer solving the problem than we were before."

"What a precious row you fellows are making about a stupid newspaper," said one of the young men irritably, "what on earth does it signify? perhaps there's no lady at

all in the case, shouldn't wonder if it had something to do with a horse. Nesta! nice name for a mare."

"Well, well, that's good for you, I never heard of a horse signing itself, 'your little Nesta,' and petitioning for an interview."

"Nonsense, those words may signify something totally different to the initiated."

"Nesta, why there's the actress Nesta Mordaunt," excitedly, from one of the young men, but he was quickly snubbed.

"Yes, it's very likely that Miss Mordaunt would make appointments through the medium of the public papers! no, I suppose it is a case of wounded affections, versus London Bridge," said Bob Clinton, shutting his eyes, and trying to make his jolly face look grave, "or the police court—breach of promise case—divorce—anything tragic you like, only you must hurry Will, if we are going to Tattersall's this afternoon."

"If you are going down there, I may as

well come too," said Percy. "I have nothing to do."

"Well, I want to look at that pair of cobs Lady Trueman is parting with," remarked the young man, "and Will said he would give me his idea on the subject, being a better judge of horseflesh, than I am."

The young men left the room, their footsteps dying away and the hum of their voices fading in the distance. The room looked deserted enough after they decamped, there was only one other man in it, and it was small wonder that he had escaped their notice, for he sat buried in a spacious arm chair, nothing to be seen of him but the back of his head, but every word that had fallen from their heedless lips had struck sharp and distinctly on his ears.

A moment he sat perfectly still, then rose, and going over to the deserted table, took up "The Times," which Percy Stanhope had thrown down, and eagerly scanned the lines

that had caused so much merriment and discussion. Could he throw any light upon the mystery? One might almost suppose he could, as he stood with lips tightly compressed, and a dark ominous frown on his face. Then he took out his penknife, and carefully cutting around the paragraph, laid it in his pocket-book, and buttoning up his coat, he, too, left the room leisurely and indifferently, nay, he even paused to speak to a friend he met on the stairs, paused nonchalantly, as if he had nothing in the world to do but kill time pleasantly and agreeably.

But once outside the club, safely down the broad steps, with no one by to mark his movements, he hurried onwards, turned the corner of the street and hailing a passing Hansom, sprang in, saying, "To Richmond and drive like the ——."

To give the cabby his full meed, he did exert himself more than was his wont, but quickly as the vehicle whirled along, it was

all too slow for its occupant. Once when they came to a block in one of the busy thoroughfares, and cabby perforce must drive at foot's pace, he gnawed his dark moustache angrily and moved uneasily in his seat, nay, even tapped at the little trap door in the roof, but cabby was too wise to waste his time in listening to abuse, which from the young man's impatience he rightly guessed was forthcoming, and at that moment a break was made, and the Hansom sped along.

When at length they reached the outskirts of Richmond, cabby paused, for the gentleman had given him no address, and to tell the truth, he was not above the weakness of mortal man, and felt the least bit in the world curious.

"There's a wummun in the case, for sure," was the logic he brought to bear on the matter, and he had had experience of some five and twenty years standing, but to his disappointment, after taking the turning in-

dicated by an eager motion of a stick from within the vehicle, and driving up a couple of streets and rounding a corner, the young man cried, "stop," and deliberately alighting, paid him his fare, neither one penny more nor less, and though he expostulated feebly, alluding touchingly to the exertions of his steed, drawing attention to the foam flickering on its nostrils, and the panting, smoking sides of the tired horse, the young man vouchsafed no reply, but walked rapidly away, leaving cabby muttering indignantly as he turned his horse's head towards home—

"Blest if he isn't a stingy white nigger, hope he mayn't get what he wants when he gets there," and with this somewhat vague imprecation he trotted back to town.

CHAPTER II.

"O mean and jealous heart what hast thou done—
What wrong to honour, spite to Christian love,
And shame to self beyond self-pardoning."
From "BITTER SWEET."

LAUREL COTTAGE—that was the name of the pretty little house the young man paused at. Not sufficiently important for a villa, but certainly very much superior to the style of house we would term a cottage. Only two stories high, it is true, but it had a gabled porch and handsome bay window, and the room into which he was ushered by the neat little maid who answered his knock, though not extravagantly, was yet both prettily and tastefully furnished. One knew the moment that one stepped over the threshold, that it was the

abode of a woman. From the open music on the top of the ebony and gold piano, to the dainty little knick-knacks scattered here and there, with lavish and tender hand, it all spoke of a woman's presence, aye, and of a woman essentially womanly and graceful. A morsel of cambric, edged with lace, not costly but dainty and pretty, with a faint perfume of roses about it, lay crumpled and tossed on the pages of an open book: as the young man moved it aside, his eye fell on the love scene between Romeo and Juliet, and a curiously scornful smile crossed his fine mouth. As he advanced to the fire-place in which burnt cheerily a bright fire, for the days were cold enough to make it a necessity, a little toy terrier leaped from its bijou kennel, and barked illnaturedly. "Zephyr! Zephyr!" he said. The little creature stood irresolute whether to reserve its tokens of displeasure at the intrusion. On the mantel-shelf was an exquisitely coloured vignette of a girl with a grave sad

face, large earnest eyes, and a wealth of dark brown hair coiled simply round her head. As he bent almost tenderly over the innocent loving face, Zephyr, determined not to lose his reputation of being a good house dog, renewed his short sharp barks, every now and then making a little furious dart forward, as if he would have liked to bite, had he dared. At this moment the door opened to admit the original of the beautiful vignette. You would have recognised her in a moment—the same sad, wistful face, the same searching gaze in the dark eyes, the same half scornful, wholly tender, droop of the sweet mouth—such was Nesta Mordaunt, and in the unconscious grace, the pretty simple way in which she came forward to greet her visitor, you would assuredly have recognised the lady, but you might very possibly have lost sight of the actress. Yet such was her profession. For two years past she had been engaged at one of the principal theatres in

London, and though by no means a star, there was yet a something very fascinating about the girl, which appealed to the hearts of her auditors, and interested them in a manner that many an accomplished actress failed to do. She was of good parentage, and when her father fell on the battle-field, and her mother weak and querulous turned to her daughter for comfort, she folded her arms round the trembling woman and bade her be of good cheer for she would never leave her. Yet what was she to do for a livelihood, Nesta sadly thought, for Captain Mordaunt had left but a meagre two hundred a-year to his wife and child, and very inadequate did the girl know this sum to be. She was not fitted to teach, even had she had a chance of finding a situation, but what mother would trust her children to the care of so young and inexperienced a girl as herself? No, the *dernier resort* of a poor gentlewoman was closed to her—and what remained? Nesta had de-

veloped some little dramatic talent, and at length resolved to undergo a course of tuition to fit her for the stage. Here, as we have said, she made neither a grand success, nor yet a decided failure. If she lacked the making of a great actress, she was yet wonderfully sweet and natural, and rapidly becoming a favourite with the English public.

But this is a long digression. Nesta has rebuked her pet for barking, and Zephyr, as she creeps back to her kennel, sees plainly what a mistake she has made, for the intruder and her mistress are evidently on very good terms.

"It is your own fault that Zephyr does not know you," says Nesta, "we thought you would have come to see us in our new home before now."

She is the first to speak, after they have shaken hands, and there is an aggrieved tone in her voice, which is mellow and sweet.

"Did you, Nesta?" he says, "I have been

busy of late. My people have been staying in town, too, and I have had to spend all my spare time with them. I ought not to be here now, for I have an appointment in less than half an hour, but I feared something had chanced to you after I read this," drawing from his pocket-book the paragraph which had appeared in that morning's "Times," "and I lost not a moment in seeking you."—Her face flushed a little—his tone though courteous had a slight tinge of annoyance, and she who knew its *timbre* so well, detected it in an instant.

"I ought not to have sent for you?". she asked "is that what you mean?"

"That depends on what you have to tell me," he answered her, "nothing but a matter of vital importance could warrant such an appeal in a public paper—it has already given rise to conjecture, and you might have known, Nesta, that to add my motto would be a sure way to attract attention to me. You are such

a clever good girl," he added, noting the signs of mortification and trouble on her face, "that one does not expect these kind of blunders from you. Don't you know, that everything depends on our intimacy, our friendship being kept secret?"

She ignored his question, answering only his first remarks. "It *is* a matter of vital importance to me," she said quietly, the warm blood tingling through her veins and suffusing her cheek. "I did not know where to address to you—when last I saw you, you told me you were leaving your old quarters, and I was not even sure at what Club I could direct to you, with any certainty of finding you, and I did not care to run the risk of a letter lying unnoticed for a week or more." So saying, she rose quietly, and drew a low seat nearer to her companion, adding after a moment's pause and with an effort—"we are leaving London next week for the provinces."

"Why, my dear little woman that is first-rate news," he cried.

"First rate news," she echoed, tears rising to the earnest eyes, "I—I thought you would be sorry, Nugent."

"Why? is it not better to be a star in the provinces, than to hold a third-rate position on the London boards?"

"But—but the separation," she said "we shall not see each other for so long, we shall be away three months, perhaps longer! what do I care," passionately, "for the *eclat* attendant on being a star in the provinces, if it must entail weeks and months spent away from you?"

"My dear child, do have a little common sense! I shall certainly see you long before the end of three months, even if I have to follow you, but you must remember it is your profession that takes you away, not any fault of mine. It is strange how little ambition you have, Nesta; I verily believe I have more for you than you have for yourself."

"Perhaps," she said wearily, "there are things nearer and dearer to me, than my profession," crimsoning all over her downcast face.

"My dear foolish little woman, I know you love me, but what can be done? Leaving ambition to take care of itself, the future welfare and happiness of your mother, and even the bread you eat, depends more or less upon your success. I have never deceived you, Nesta, you do not need me to tell you in so many words, that, although I love you, I cannot marry you."

"No," she said bitterly, "and sometimes I really believe I do not wish it, you are such a strangely constituted being. I believe that if any wealthy man wanted to marry me, despite the love you profess for me, you would bid me accept him."

"So I would," he answered her, "you would be most foolish to refuse a good offer for my sake, and it would not be love, but simple selfishness that would allow me to

obey the dictates of my heart, and bid you remain single. I am not in a position to marry, and if I were—"

"You would not chose for your wife, the girl you have honoured with your protestations of affection!"

All of pride and self-respect was roused in the breast of the actress, "in what am I not your equal, Mr. Monroe?" she asked haughtily, "I am an actress, that is my profession, you are a barrister, that is yours; you spend your earnings, I support my mother with mine; is there any degradation in that? You have led what the world calls a fast life, if you are steady now, is it not because vice has lost its charm and novelty, and satiety which is the Nemesis of pleasure's devotees, has overtaken you? In the midst of a cold censorious world, hemmed in by temptations, *I* stand as innocent and pure as your own sister, you know this to be so," proudly "you know that no one among the

bevy of admirers, who flock around Nesta Mordaunt's doors, has ever had a particle of encouragement. God has never forsaken the orphan girl in her endeavours to be true, and no woman, be she ever so high in power, or never so hard and callous at heart, can throw a stone at me, or dare to cast a shadow on my name. I may be lacking in ambition, but I am not wanting in pride, Mr. Monroe, and the only reason that I have listened to your taunting words so quietly to-day, is, that I cannot yet forget that you were my father's friend, that he trusted you—(Heaven only knows whether that confidence were misplaced,) and that he bade me never take a step without consulting you. Of late, I will confess, another motive has imperceptibly crept in, and thus obedience to my father's dying commands, has linked itself with a feeling I never experienced before, a vast and deep love, which I now bitterly regret." Low grew her tones, until the last words were

almost whispered, and the poise of the noble head lost itself in the drooping, downcast face. With dark lashes shadowing the sweet eyes, tremulous mouth, and heaving breast, with all the pride of her nature, and humiliation of her love upon her, Nesta Mordaunt was a picture a painter would have loved, the fairest, saddest thing you could conceive.

Nugent Monroe was touched. He had never known until the moment in which she thus asserted herself, how dear she had become to him, but the proud, defiant tones, and anon the sad, pathetic wail, went home to him, and Nugent Monroe learned that day what he had never known before, that somewhere under his cold, sarcastic exterior beat a heart. To that new and curiously unaccustomed ache, he yielded, and rising and facing the girl, he said—

"I beg your pardon, I ask your forgiveness for anything that I all unwittingly have said to grieve you, I—I—oh, Nesta," watching

the face which had grown so strangely white and hard. "I would to Heaven that I could marry you! I believe I should be a better and a happier man for the influence you would have over me, for I love you, my darling."

"You are not ashamed to confess that you love me?"

Why did she speak so coldly, so bitterly, and contemptuously.

"Ashamed! no, truly, any man might be proud of such a confession."

"Nugent!" with the word, the cold calm of her face broke up, and a wondrous softened light played over it, and her whole soul shone through the eyes she lifted shyly to his. Nugent Monroe's new-found heart gave a sudden leap, and yielding to the impulse, scattering to the winds his prudence, and worldly wisdom, he cried, "Nesta you shall be mine, darling; I mean it, for I could not live without your love."

A moment she gazed into the eyes that

passionately sought hers, and reading there that he was in earnest, and that the moment had come which she had so yearned for, when he should not only speak of his love for her, but also ask her to be his cherished, honoured wife, she bent forward and laid her head upon his breast, and he folded her in his arms with mingled caresses and whispered love words.

"If it be true," she said at last, "give me this," touching a hoop set with corals, and he placed it on her finger, which was a world too small for such a fetter, but she shook her head when he told her how he would buy her a much handsomer one than that.

"No, no, I do not want any other than this," she said.

"Nesta,"—by and by, when the twilight began to creep on, and the face of his love grew dim among the shadows—"do you know what a long, long time it must be before we can marry—if ever? I am only a briefless barrister, little woman."

"I will be the bread-winner," she said joyously.

"You! child, you do not suppose that I would allow my wife to appear on the stage?"

"No," sighing, "I am glad Nugent, for I hate it; one is exposed to so many slights, so many indignities there, which one's position makes it impossible to resent."

"Be patient under them for a short time longer," he said fondly, "it will be best that you should carry out the plans you had decided on, go into the provinces, and by the time your engagement is at an end, I trust I shall see light ahead, and we can then determine what our future is to be; it is all very vague, and we are terribly imprudent, little woman, still we love each other and who can tell what good fortune may not be in store, and how soon I may be able to offer a home to my darling."

"And the ambition that I was so sadly

lacking in, an hour ago," slily, "where is it now, Nugent?"

"Submerged in my love for you," he answered her, "we will have a still higher aim now."

"Yes," she said, "to make each other's life joyous and content."

He did not gainsay her, but it was scarcely in this wise that Nugent Monroe had meant to finish his sentence.

Nesta Mordaunt was truly happy that night. There are not many moments in a life-time that one can look back upon from the vista of long and troublous years, and say, "I was perfectly happy then." And yet there are some such red-letter days, in the diary of every human life, but never an hour came again to Nesta Mordaunt so peerlessly bright, and golden, as those that sped on eagle's wings, on the night when her lover chose her from all the world for his wife, and when, believing in him with the guilelessness

of a little child, she could have staked her faith upon his simple word. No shadow of fear, no lurking dread of any ill chance that could come between them. Could an angel have come down to convince her of her lover's fealty and truth, she had not been more assured, and in that joyous trust, and child-like faith, she bade him a last good-by, stepping out into the star-lit night, for the shades of evening had closed in, ere Nugent Monroe tore himself away. And listening with a pleased, happy smile, to his reiterated promises of seeing her again, before she left town, and with her hands clasped tightly in his, she wished him once more God speed, and so he passed from her sight, and she went indoors, with the light of her new happiness illumining and beautifying her gentle face, and the echo of his words sounding in her ears, and he—well, just at first, he, too, felt a flutter of hope and content stirring at his heart, as he bowled along the moon-

lit lanes, but ere he reached town, he threw the end of his cigar angrily on the side-walk, muttering, "How on earth did I ever happen to make such a fool of myself!" and uncomfortable thoughts forced themselves on his mind, of his father's disapproving looks, and the wonderment that would be depicted on his mother's aristocratic features, when he should introduce Miss Mordaunt, of the "Regent's Theatre," to them as his bride-elect, and the last words that he uttered that night, were the reverse of a blessing on the trick fortune had played him, in directing his steps to Richmond, and the fair sweet loveliness of his *fiancèe* which had thrown so great a spell over him and sealed his fate.

Well was it for Nesta Mordaunt, that she did not guess at her lover's speedy repentance, she would scarcely have slept so peacefully could she have imagined, how already the promises he had made in a

moment of weakness, were bitterly regretted, or foresee, how speedily the sunlight now flooding her path, must be quenched in the blackest gloom that can settle on a human soul.

CHAPTER III.

"Alas for the rarity,
Of Christian charity,
Under the Sun."

HOOD.

"MONICA, dreaming as usual! what can you find to think about so much?"

Monica Hazletine turned round with a half angry start, at being thus interrogated, but she replied amicably enough, "Ah, Frida, I might have known it was you, giddy-pate! Why"—catching sight of the little figure, which had mysteriously vanished behind the capacious arm-chair in which she sat, "Frida, come here child and let me look at you. I suppose you are off to Erleswood ball, and are bent on making conquests,

come here witch," as the dainty figure eluded her grasp.

Thus adjured, Frida Escott emerged from her retreat and stood before her questioner, bashful, blushing, but resplendent.

Winifred Escott was very *petite*, a fragile, little being, of the Sevrés china type, with large blue eyes, and a certain winsomeness in her face that defied criticism.

"I came on purpose to let you see my dress, Monica," she said, "don't you think it is very pretty?"

"I do," replied the lady, taking in every detail, from the diamond stars, flashing in the pretty pink ears, to the blue and white rosettes on the little satin shoes. Billowy waves of soft blue tulle enveloped the small figure like a cloud, contrasting well with the fair hair (not golden, but a pure flaxen), that fell over her shoulders.

"You have a great deal to answer for, Monica," she laughed saucily, as oblivious of

her finery she sank down on the white fleecy rug at her friend's feet. "I expect I shall get into frightful disgrace, but you must know that I made up my mind this afternoon that I would come and see you before we started for Erleswood; so as soon as dinner was over, I slipped away, and coaxed Maunders to help me; she was rather crabby about it too. I've had a deal to put up with," shaking her head reflectively, "but I daresay the poor thing hadn't had her tea; well, I let her go at last, and then I remembered the wreath for my hair, and tried to fasten it in myself, but it wouldn't go right somehow, the flowers stuck up all over like so many quills, so I just left it, and came without."

"What a wild child you are," said Mrs. Hazletine, smiling indulgently; "but I am afraid Aunt Prue will be sadly vexed with you."

"I daresay,"—scornfully—"I left word that Claire was to call for me in the carriage,"

—majestically—then suddenly bursting into a peal of laughter — "Oh, Monica, you should have seen Peters' face; he thought it was all right fetching me a cab, you know, for I didn't seem a bit as if I were doing anything on the sly. I just walked quietly down stairs, and said, 'Fetch me a cab, please Peters,' and there I stood buttoning my glove and looking quite demure, although I was awfully afraid, lest the drawing room door should open, and Aunt Prue come out and catch me; and Peters said, 'Yes, Miss,' and in two minutes there was one at the door, and as I got in, I said, 'I don't think Aunt Prue knows that I am going, Peters, so just tell her, please, that I have gone to Mrs. Hazletine's, and that Claire is to call for me on her way to the ball. Oh, Monica,"—laughing again—"his face was as good as a play! I believe he would have liked to pull me out again if he had dared, but I cried 'Drive on Cabby,' and off we went, and here

I am, and you ought to be very grateful to me, Monica, for running such frightful risks."

"Frida, Frida, you are the veriest little scapegrace that ever existed. I should not be at all surprised if Claire should go without you."

"Oh, Monica, you don't mean it! what! go to the ball without me,"—distressed—"I don't believe she would *dare* do such an ill-natured thing," flushing, however, and looking very uneasy.

"No, darling, I do not think you need be alarmed; but, seriously, you ought not to play such mad-cap pranks. I am sure Guardy would be very angry, if he were to find it out."

"He is not likely to know, unless Claire tells him, for he went into his library before I left the dinner table," she said. Then, with a sudden, happy thought, "Oh, Monica, Claire will be obliged to come and fetch me. Look here" (picking up a fur-lined opera

cloak), "I brought this with me, for I did not think my white bernouse would be warm enough."

"So you appropriated Claire's, with a great deal of presence of mind. Oh, Frida!"

Monica's eyes twinkled with amusement.

"What do you suppose she will do without it?"

"Why, of course, she'll know directly that I have taken it. I always do take Claire's things, if they are nicer than mine, and not too long, or too wide, for me to wear; and I always had a particular fancy for this furry thing, it is so warm and comfortable."

"Well, you deserve a scolding, Frida. I don't wonder you are never out of hot water, if you are in the habit of perpetrating these kind of jokes often, and purloining Claire's property with such *sang froid*."

But Frida's thoughts had reverted to another subject.

"Why won't Godfrey let you take us to-

night, Monica?" she asked; "it would have been so nice if you could have chaperoned us instead of that stupid Mrs. Willows, who, I am perfectly convinced, will have a headache, or toothache, or some other distressing complaint, and want to come away before it is half over. It is too bad; I quite counted on your going, Monica. Why won't Godfrey let you go?"

There was a slight pause before the lady answered.

"I have not been very strong lately," she said; "I daresay that is the reason."

"I daresay it is nothing of the sort," rejoined the girl, pertly; "it is just because he is disagreeable, Monica."

"Hush!" (putting her hand over Frida's rebellious mouth). "We have discussed this point before, and you know I told you then, that I cannot listen to disparaging remarks of my husband."

"All very fine," grumbled Frida; "I don't

suppose you care a pin whether you go or not; but I *do* care a great deal—that's all the difference, you see. I can't think what makes Godfrey so perverse; he was ever so much nicer when you were married, Monica."

"Ah! that is a long time ago, my child. We have all changed since then," gently.

"That is nonsense, Monica. I've not changed—you've not changed—and I don't think three years is such a very long time."

"The length of a period depends very much on whether one is happy, or the reverse," murmured Mrs. Hazletine.

"Have you not been happy dear?" asked the sharp-witted girl.

"As happy as any one ever is in this world, I daresay, darling."

But Monica Hazletine knew that she was not speaking truly, and even Frida Escott's merry spirit was subdued.

"What does that little song of your's

say?" asked Monica, gaily, after a few moment's silence—

> "The hours when spent without thee
> Are—oh, ten times as long."

But Frida did not respond; she sat curled up at Monica's feet—a little blue ball, gazing wistfully up into the calm, grave face above her. At last she spoke, shaking her head, solemnly—

"Well, when I marry, I hope I shan't have Godfrey for a husband."

"No, dear, I hope not," Monica laughed; "but that is a contingency that can scarcely happen while I am living."

A slight noise in the hall, approaching footsteps, and Frida sprang to her feet; her cheeks flushed, and eyes sparkling with mischief and merriment.

"It is Claire!" she cried, "and—oh! Monica—good gracious!—that is Aunt Prue's voice. What can she have come for?"

Her question was answered a moment later. Miss Prudence Escott threw open the door, and entered, followed by a young girl, prettily dressed in salmon-coloured silk, with ivy leaves in her dark hair.

"Now, Winifred, I have just come to know what is the meaning of this," demanded Miss Escott, angrily.

Dreading a saucy reply, Monica interposed.

"Don't be vexed, Aunt Prue; Frida knew that I could not go to the ball myself, and I think it was very good-natured of her to come round here before she went."

"But she had no right to do any such thing," cried the spinster, wrathfully. "I never heard of such a proceeding—never!" and the row of little grey curls at each side of her face quivered and shook, like bluebells in the summer breeze. "Do you know, that she came away without any flowers in her hair, and left her fan on the dressing

table, and—why here is your cloak, Claire," pouncing on the white fur that Frida had appropriated. "Really, Winifred, I don't know what will become of you; we have been kept waiting half an hour at least hunting for this cloak. Claire keeps her things in such beautiful order that she could not imagine how it had vanished! It is too bad, and I wonder you are not ashamed," pausing at length for want of breath, not for lack of words.

"So I am, Aunt Prue—dreadfully ashamed," said her niece, meekly, "and I'll never do so any more."

"Oh! go along with you, making fun of me; you know you'll do the very same in five minutes, if you are not looked after," yet her eyes lingered tenderly on Frida's half-repentant face as she spoke.

Claire Escott stood a little apart, disdainful and silent, until now, when she spoke in clear, cutting tones—

"Well, aunt, if you think you have lectured Frida enough, and she is sufficiently penitent, we had better be going. I promised Mrs. Willows to be with her at ten o'clock; it is now half-past, and it will take us at least a quarter of an hour to get there."

"Yes, yes, my dear, you are always so sensible. I wish, Winifred, you would imitate your sister a little more."

The girl made a little *moue* of dissent, which luckily escaped her aunt's notice; and Monica took the wreath of convolvolus, which Miss Escott had been all this time grasping firmly in both hands, and twined it deftly and gracefully round the fair head.

"There, child, now you are as pretty as a picture," she said, fondly.

"How you flatter the girl, Monica!" remonstrated Miss Escott. "I never was an advocate for spoiling young people."

"Auntie, dear, I will endorse that remark," cried the irrepressible Frida.

Miss Escott's brow darkened, and Monica hurriedly turned to Claire, saying—

"I have hardly had a glimpse of you yet."

"I have nothing new to show you," replied the girl, coldly. "I wore this dress at Mrs. Dymock's; you saw it then."

"It looks very nicely," remarked Monica.

But Miss Escott's lynx eyes had just made a discovery.

"Winifred, surely you have not torn your new dress," she cried, catching hold of the girl, and detaining her.

"I believe I have—a tiny tear, Aunt Prue; I could not help it. I caught it on the door of the cab."

"Cab!—what cab?" cried the lady, aghast.

"The one that brought me here, of course," said Frida, defiantly. "How did you imagine I came, aunt?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I am never surprised at anything you do, Winifred," said

Miss Escott, in her most dignified tones; "you act exactly as you choose, and set me completely at defiance.

"Nonsense, auntie; I love you, dearly," replied the girl, darting to her side, and inflicting a hug on her."

"Well, child, go, or Mrs. Willows will think you are not coming at all."

Monica pressed Miss Escott to remain with her, and although she at first declined, she finally yielded, so far as to consent to stay until the girls had reached the ball room, when the carriage was to return and fetch her.

"And now those tiresome children have really gone, Monica, tell me a little about yourself," said the lady, sinking down on the comfortable sofa.

"You are not looking well."

"No Aunt Prue, I am not feeling strong, and am still under Dr. Warren's care—he tells me I require good nursing and perfect rest."

"Just, what I have always said," assented

the spinster oracularly, "but you see, Monica, you have always had such a peculiarly colourless complexion, and yet enjoyed good health, that they all laughed at me when I said I was sure there was something wrong with you."

"There is nothing to be alarmed at, aunt," Monica smiled quietly—"it is nothing in the world but debility. I have never felt really strong since Marguerite was born."

"And it is entirely your own fault," said Miss Escott severely, "if you would have listened to advice, you would be a healthier, stronger woman than you are to-day, but you persisted in doing far too much before your child was born, and almost immediately afterwards you went abroad—travelling, forsooth—when you were only fit for your bed or the sofa, to say nothing of the dear babe you left to the tender mercies of servants. People oughtn't to bring children into the world if they don't mean to take some little care for, and interest in them, that's what *I* say!"

pursued Miss Escott, sniffing vigorously. Monica flushed a little.

"Aunt, you have no right to speak in this way," she said, "no one can say with truth that my child has been neglected."

"No, indeed," was the tart rejoinder, "but no thanks to you Mrs. Godfrey Hazletine, that it is so. Frida is so wrapped up in the child, that if she were her own baby, instead of yours, she could scarcely love her more, but *that* does not prevent *your* neglect of her being a shameful and a cruel thing—oh, yes, I dare say you are very angry with me, people never do get any thanks for telling the truth, but I never shrink from what I think is my duty, however disagreeable it may be to perform."

"Aunt Prue, you have been neither wife nor mother—how, then, can you be competent to judge of my feelings or actions?"

Miss Escott rose, hot and flurried.

"I could have married had I chosen to do so twenty years ago, Mrs. Hazletine," she said in-

dignantly, "but I preferred to remain single for reasons of which you, wife and mother though you are, might possibly comprehend nothing. In every true woman's heart, be she married or single, there is an instinct of maternity, a something that rises responsive to, and thrills under the touch of baby fingers, a something which with all your experience, and knowledge, you seem to have missed, Monica."

"I am very fond of Marguerite," said the lady, slowly and thoughtfully—

"Fond!" sneered Miss Escott—"if you are fond of your husband in the same way, I do not marvel that your household is not a happy one."

"Who dares to say my household is not a happy one?"

"I dare to say it," answered her visitor irritably.

"And by what right do you dare to say it, madam?" Monica Hazletine's anger was fairly roused.

"Monica, my dear, don't be so impetuous," cried Aunt Prue, deprecatingly—"I only say that you and Godfrey are not happy together—that you are not suited to, and misunderstand each other—that is all, my dear!"

"All!" Monica covered her face with her hands.

Miss Escott moved uneasily, patting the black mittens on her hands every now and then, and peeping furtively at the quiet figure opposite her.

By and by Monica looked up, saying quietly, but fiercely—"Aunt Prue if you are to be a visitor, and a welcome guest here, you must never speak again as you have just done. Neither you nor any one else can guarantee my, or my husband's, peace and happiness. Each heart knows its own bitterness, and every man and woman among us must bear their own trials. It is a delicate thing to intermeddle with husband and wife—*I* cannot brook interference, and I will not have it, Miss

Escott—my husband and my child, whether they be dear to me or not, are yet *mine*, and neither you nor any one else, are justified in raking up what discord there may be. I am grateful to you for your kindly-meant advice, at the same time I beg you to understand that I allow no human being to lay bare my heart, or seek to fathom my motives for what I do —I am answerable for my feelings and actions to my God alone."

"Yes dear, yes," said the old lady tremulously, "I didn't mean to hurt you by what I said—it was all for the best, only—you are so touchy my dear—and—and—I believe I hear the carriage coming, so I will say good-night."

Mrs. Hazletine rose and wrapped Miss Escott's shawl closely round her, and even stooped her face to receive the old lady's kiss, but she made no effort to see her visitor down stairs, contenting herself with ringing for her servants. For a few moments she stood

where Miss Escott had left her, mid-way in the spacious drawing-room, her hand on the back of a richly gilt chair, upright, cold and defiant, but as the sound of retreating carriage wheels fell on her ear, she loosened her grasp, and moved slowly across the room, and resting her white arms on the mantle-shelf, bowed her head upon them.

CHAPTER IV.

"I—who once was like an April day,
That finds quick tears in every cloud, have steeled
My heart against my fate, and now am calm—
I will live on, and though these simple folk
. . . . . Understand me not,
It matters little."

BITTER SWEET.

"CAN this last for ever? how much can a human heart bear, before it breaks? And yet, I do not think I feel this as keenly as I once should have done. I am slowly but surely hardening—my daily torture has left so deep a brand, that suffering has no longer power to scathe and sear me. And I am so young—so young to feel and know that my life is wrecked beyond repair, and that my burden must go down with me to the grave.

Aunt Prue has dared to reproach me, to taunt me with my lack of love for my child. I am 'cold and heartless,' she said, 'not worthy of a mother's blessings and privileges, because I do not know how to appreciate them—have missed a something from my life which yet enters into every woman's lot,' she said—'the joys and comforts of maternity.' Oh, my babe, if I am cold and hard, it is because I do not *dare* to love you; because I have vowed never to loosen the flood-gates of my heart's affections again, never, so long as I live, to subject myself to the awful agony of seeing those I worship grow indifferent to me. Not love thee, my precious babe! Nay, it is because my love passes the love of mothers, that I must needs keep it pent up, lest it rise at last and crush me.

"'If I loved my husband in like manner, she did not wonder that our household was not a happy one.'

"What can that stiff, angular old maid

know of the inner workings of the wife's and mother's heart? Heaven knows, I loved him once—worshipped him, reverenced him, as women are not wont to idolise their husbands. And when we drifted apart, when he showed me in a hundred ways that he did not deem me worthy of his confidence, when he persisted in treating me as a child, a toy, a plaything, I think—it broke my heart! I know that all my love changed to indifference, and now I am fast losing that, and I shudder to think what the next step must bring—hate! I staked my all on the devotion of a human being, and—I—have—lost. But now, I have schooled myself to love him moderately, to keep back all that is distasteful to him. How often has he loosed my arms from about his neck, with a whispered reproof for my childishness? It is long since I offended in that way. I have no longer the inclination, for I have learned to measure out the love that once was boundless, but, methinks love is too

tender a plant to bear the pruning knife—the chances are, that it will slip aside, and, striking at the roots, kill it for ever.

"When my babe first saw the light, I crushed within me the impulse to snatch it to me, to press my fevered lips to its tiny features, to rock it on my bosom, to whisper of the new love that had sprung up in the desert within me, to weep out the bitterness of my heart. I schooled myself to calmness, and, touching its forehead with my lips, laid it back in the nurse's arms. I *feared* to love it inordinately, lest there should be life and feeling still left in my heart, and thus I should be made to suffer again. And oh, how I shrank from the misery inflicted by a nature so passionately adoring as mine. Yet my husband loves our child. At stated times she comes downstairs, my pretty babe, with her soft golden curls, and he plays with her, but she in no way interferes with our pursuits. 'That is as it should be,' he said to me on

one occasion, 'children who usurp the attention of a whole household are made nuisances both to their parents and friends.' I assented meekly, but my hungry heart cried out for more than these chance caresses of my child, and my little one loves Frida better than she does me—her mother. And I look on, and almost forget to be jealous, yet I feel that the constant, unrelaxed tension, the strong curb I am forced to put upon myself, is slowly, but surely, killing me—wearing out both heart and brain. Perhaps it would be better for me, for Godfrey, for our child, if I were laid to rest—yet, I am so young—so young to have known such keen suffering."

Monica Hazletine's wail was a piteous one. Had you seen her three years before our story commences I scarcely think you would have recognised her as she is now—saddened—subdued—cold, and imperious.

She was Captain Escott's ward and had lived ten years of uneventful life under his

roof, looking upon Claire and Frida as sisters, and clinging to Aunt Prue (John Escott's maiden sister) with affection, despite the old lady's rough exterior, and sharp tongue.

Monica Leslie was considered a beauty in the small town in which they lived; with her rich, creamy complexion, and masses of ruddy gold hair, and ripe red lips, which, parting when she smiled, disclosed the even row of pearls within, she certainly was a woman you would not meet in every day's ramble.

It was at a public ball in town that she first met Godfrey Hazletine. She was then scarcely twenty, but she looked fully two years older, for her beauty and stature had a certain matureness that enhanced their charm. As Godfrey Hazletine shrewdly remarked—"She was not of the ordinary run of girls."

Each time he met her he became more enamoured. Her dignified carriage pleased him wonderfully. What would have abashed and intimidated a less confident man, appealed

to him forcibly, and lured him on as beauty alone would have been powerless to do. Girl though she was, she might have lived a lifetime in the world of fashion and not have learned what her innate gracefulness made so easy to her. And so it came about that Godfrey Hazletine proposed, in due form, to Captain Escott for the hand of his ward, and was accepted. All this was quite *en règle*, perhaps Monica would have preferred that her handsome lover should have appealed to her feelings, before he solicited her hand of her guardian, but there was no lack of love and warmth in the beautiful brown eyes that looked up into his own, as she whispered the tiny monosyllable that sealed her fate. It was a mistake, they were thoroughly unsuited to each other. Mr. Hazletine was a polished man of the world, one who had seen life in all its phases—good, bad, and indifferent. As such, he would have made a good husband to many a girl he met in society and scorned,

but the heart of the woman he had married cried out for more than he gave her—her passionate, untutored nature, could not subsist on the crumbs of well regulated affection he doled out with stinted hand. Up to her marriage-day he believed her to be as impassive and statuesque as she looked, but awoke to find her transformed into a passionately adoring wife.

Do you marvel that what would have been at once the joy and pride of many a husband's heart, should only have angered and provoked Godfrey Hazletine? yet so it was;—of an undemonstrative and peculiarly reserved nature himself, he loved her in a calm, equable spirit, and wished that she should return his affection in like measure, little dreaming of the depth of feeling she carried under a stately exterior. He secretly thought the numberless little attentions dictated by love, ill-timed and childish. They bored him, but once or twice, when he

ventured to hint this to her, she turned away with a surprised start, and a glance of wounded love in her sweet eyes, which he could not bear to see, so he yielded to her caresses.

"All this will wear off by and by," he told himself, "and she will settle down like all other women into a sober, steady matron." But months passed by, and Monica Hazletine still loved her husband as fondly as ever, and still unconsciously provoked his wrath by showing it in a hundred little acts and ways.

"Let me fetch your slippers Godfrey," she said once, when he had come home tired, and vexed with business worries.

"I wish you would not trouble yourself, Monica," he answered shortly.

"It is no trouble dear," she said again, for she could not understand his meaning.

"I don't like it," he replied tersely, "it is not seemly, that you, my wife, should wait on

me, we have plenty of servants to do that style of thing."

"Oh, Godfrey, it is my pleasure to be of use to you." She had better have kept silent.

"How can you be so childish," he said angrily, "will you never learn your position as my wife, and mistress of this establishment? I might as well have married one of those little golden haired nonentities, and it looks the more absurd in *you*, for you are naturally dignified and almost regal—darling."

But she shrank from him, hurt most bitterly. She did not retort as many a less proud woman would have done, that he could have chosen where and whom he willed, but she rose at once from her lowly position at his knees, the bright tears glittering in her eyes. He never saw them as he took up the evening paper, which her wifely care had placed at his side.

After a while he looked round the room, meaning to call her to his side; he had not intended to speak harshly, but she *must* learn to break herself of these absurd demonstrations of affection; but she had slipped away unobserved. Poor child, she was sobbing out her foolish little heart upstairs, telling herself mournfully, that Godfrey had ceased to love her, and she was very miserable. Nearly two hours later Godfrey Hazletine found her asleep, her arm thrown carelessly on the wide window seat, and her head resting upon it. He glanced at the swollen eyelids with a sort of pity stirring at his heart, nevertheless he felt angry and injured at this display of womanly weakness. "Any one of the maids might have come in, and found her here, and then there would have been a nice scandal in the servant's hall," he muttered, "they would soon have circulated a report, that 'Master was very unkind to Missus.' Monica is not a baby, she ought to have more pride and sense

than to subject me to this kind of thing." Yet she looked so forlorn and wretched, lying there, that when she awoke, stiff from the weary posture, and wondering how she came to be there, he spoke kindly, even fondly to her, and she laid her head on her pillow that night feeling happier and more comforted, than she had thought possible a couple of hours before.

But after that day, she gained a clearer insight into her husband's character, and learned by slow degrees and painful experience, that if she wished to keep his love, she must curb her own, and not allow it to become obtrusive, and an annoyance to him.

Little did Godfrey guess, in those few first months, how the heart of his girl wife ached, and hungered, refusing to be satisfied with his calm, quiet kiss, and how she had to bite her lips and still her heart-throbs when she heard his footstep, lest she should throw her arms round his neck, and clinging to him,

murmur her delight at seeing him; after a long day spent alone.

At the end of three years, Godfrey Hazletine did not complain of his wife's demonstrativeness, and too eager affection; on the contrary, he was sometimes conscious of a strange new feeling within him, that prompted him to draw her to him, but she had entrenched herself with so cold a reserve, had hemmed herself in with so icy and frigid a hauteur, that he did not care to venture. Obedient to his slightest demand, she never now forestalled his wishes. Fearing to offend at first, anxious lest she should annoy, she had at length ceased to feel any inclination, for what had once been her greatest delight.

Godfrey Hazletine actually caught himself once or twice looking back upon the past, and regretting the change.

Eleven o'clock, twelve, and half-past, struck upon the pretty ormulu clock on the mantleshelf, and still Monica Hazletine sat oblivious

of the flight of time, wrapped in her own sad musings, conjuring up the ghosts of the years that were not. Nor did she move when the door at length opened sharply, and her husband strode into the room.

"What Monica, up still?" he exclaimed. One moment, I want to describe Monica's husband. He was very tall and well proportioned, with a face which was singularly handsome, though a slightly mocking expression somewhat marred its perfect beauty, brown hair with a sunny gleam athwart its waves, the under lip a trifle too full, perhaps, but the critic forgot to notice this, when it parted over the white and even teeth.

"Is not your husband very cynical, Monica?" asked pretty little Mrs. Bertram once.

"Cynical! no, certainly not," responded his wife, feeling annoyed at the query, for it was in the early days of their marriage, while

the first gloss was still on her happiness, and the veil still enshrouded her idol, but she solaced herself with the reflection that her friend evidently knew very little about him, or she could never have hazarded such an opinion. But Mrs. Bertram was not singular in her belief. Yet Godfrey Hazletine need not have cultivated a sarcastic expression, for he was "of the world," and therefore, one whom the world uses well.

"Yes, Godfrey," replied Monica simply, to his somewhat astonished remark.

"Why, how is that?" advancing to the fire to light the taper he had taken from one of the side tables.

She ignored his question, shivering a little as she rose from her chair.

"You are late, Godfrey!"

"Yes,"—carelessly—"talking with Monroe, the time passed so pleasantly, I did not take much count of it."

A close observer might have noted the deli-

cate hand tremble, and a faint tinge suffuse the ivory cheek.

"By the by, Monica, he will dine here to-morrow."

"Who?" she queried faintly.

"Who?—Monroe, of course."

She half hesitated—"Any one else?" she asked.

"No."

"Then I think I shall ask Frida," she said.

He turned round smiling—"Match-making my wife!"

"Oh no," she answered coldly, "I believe in marriages being made in Heaven." One long, lingering glance at the pure cold face, then he said, "Do you? then I think they must get uncommonly mixed up together in the descent to earth."

She flashed one look at him out of her proud eyes, but deigned no reply as she swept from the room. But as she ascended the stone staircase, a curiously tender expres-

sion stole over her features, and she murmured beneath her breath, "I wonder who I was allotted to, and if I shall ever meet—if I *have* met my kindred spirit—or if my soul is doomed to live alone through all the weary future—ever seeking for sympathy and finding none." Ah, the days were fast approaching, the hours were numbered, when the scorned love that had been thrust back on her hungry soul, should leap into life and being for another than her husband, and she must enter upon the martyrdom of pain that was to cleanse the proud heart, and taste of the sorrow that purifies.

CHAPTER V.

[redacted]

its real size, for it is not spacious, though amply large enough for the Captain's small family—consisting only, at the present time, of his sister Prudence—and his daughters, Claire and Winifred.

Aunt Prue had grumbled sadly at the necessary outlay.

"John—John—you are a great deal too yielding; if it had not been Frida's whim, you would never have thought of such a thing—it did not require it that I can see—it was always good enough for Mary."

The old Captain winced. It was twenty years ago since he had lost his wife, but the wound still rankled, and when probed by Aunt Prue's unheeding hand, it gaped and ached as in the first days of his sorrow.

Mary Escott died in giving birth to Winifred, and her husband remained inconsolable.

With all her harshness and stupid blunderings, Prudence Escott was a kind and good-hearted woman, and when she heard of

her brother's loss, she straightway left her own little home, and took up her residence at Fairholm, resolved to cheer her brother's life, and supply, as best she could, a mother's place to Mary's babes. Claire was then five years of age, and Winifred but a few days old. Broken-hearted, John Escott accepted his sister's offer with deep gratitude, and from that day, Prudence Escott nobly fulfilled the task she had taken upon herself.

Frida was the scape-goat of the family! Torn frocks and unlearned lessons as a child brought down rebukes upon her pretty fair head, and truly, as Aunt Prue sighed and said, she seemed little less wild or more self-reliant at nineteen than she had done at five, when to find her quiet, was to be assured that she was in mischief. Sweet and loveable, but withal, thoughtless and inconsiderate, and perhaps a little selfish, too; such was Frida Escott, her aunt's torment and the sunshine of her father's life.

Claire differed as much in temperament and disposition, as she did in appearance. Surely never were sisters so wholly dissimilar. Infinitely superior did Claire Escott consider herself to be, compared with her younger sister—from early childhood had she been held up as an example to the impulsive Frida, for some how Claire steered clear of all peccadilloes, rarely if ever incurring punishment, whereas, Frida was in disgrace and forgiven twenty times a day.

"Why don't you amuse yourself as Claire does?" Aunt Prue would ask, when the nurse complained of Miss Winifred's naughtiness.

The child would shake her head, looking up sweetly and earnestly, into the severe features, thereby almost disarming her aunt's wrath.

"Auntie," she confided one day, "I think Claire does not *want* to do naughty things, or else she would do them." Aunt Prue looked reprovingly on this piece of childish logic.

"No, my dear," she said, "Claire does not disobey, because she knows it is wrong."

Yet there was a great deal in what Frida urged—there was no temptation to Claire in stealing nurse's thimble, or in hiding Snow the white kitten, under her dress when they were at lessons; her faults were far more serious, the love of dominion, and the self-sufficiency and dominant notion of her own faultlessness, fostered as a child, became more apparent as she grew up to womanhood. Miss Escott praised her openly, spoke to her father of the girl's orderly habits, and quiet gentle manner, and he would say how proud he was of her, and yet it was Frida, the naughty little puss, that would creep into his arms, and twine herself round his heart-strings. But as in childhood, so in after life, Frida made some enemies and many friends, Claire *no* enemies and no friends.

It was a pity that Claire was so self-sufficient, for she was undoubtedly a bright,

clever girl, an ornament to society, and her father was justly proud of her, but had you asked him which was the dearer of the two, he would have confessed that Frida, with her sunshiny smile, and gay rippling laugh, was the idol of his heart and the joy of his life.

When Colonel Leslie died, and left his only child alone in the world, his old friend, John Escott, came forward, and took her home, and thus, when Monica was ten years old, and Claire just the same age, the little orphan came under Captain Escott's roof, and a loving guardian had he ever been to her.

There had never been an open animosity between Claire and Monica, yet the latter was fully aware of the deep dislike that existed for her in Claire's jealous heart. She could not forgive the admiration that fell to Monica's lot, though could she have known it, they were in reality foils to each other, and those who admired Claire's radiant prettiness, would not have cast a glance on the pure Grecian

features of Monica Leslie—on the other hand, no one among the worshippers at Monica's shrine would have knelt at Claire Escott's feet.

The envy that was rampant in Claire's heart reached its climax, when Monica accepted Godfrey Hazletine's offer, and left Fairholm. As a married woman, Monica enjoyed a supremacy, to which Claire could never attain; she never entered the pretty drawing rooms at "The Grange," without a sharp sting of envy at the costly luxuriance there, and curled her lip scornfully, when Frida, in the fullness of her loving little heart, expatiated on the elegancies that Mr. Hazletine's purse could well afford.

It was little wonder that Monica clung to Frida with deepest affection, and the self-willed girl would listen to advice from her lips that she would take from no others. To Claire's scorn and sharp reproof she turned a deaf ear—at Aunt Prue's remonstrances she

only laughed—at her father's whispered admonitions she flung herself into his arms, and stopped his lips with kisses, but when Monica spoke to her in her own grave, sweet way, the girl paused and heeded, for of all beings on this earth after her grey-haired father, she worshipped and reverenced Monica Hazletine.

* * * * * * *

It was early morning, and the sun streamed brightly through the windows at Fairholm, giving Frida an excuse for laying down her work.

Miss Escott looked up at the girl as she lay back lazily in her comfortable chair.

"My dear, I don't think Marguerite's dress will progress much, at the rate you have been working."

"No," yawned Frida.

From her place in the broad window seat Claire remarked—

"That is a matter of sublime indifference to Frida, aunt."

"No, it is not," responded the girl, annoyed at the aggressive tone. "You know I want to finish it by Rita's birthday."

"And that won't be for five months."

"But look at the amount of work there is in it, these little sprays are endless, besides I have heaps of other things to do," said the little lady, in a tone of vast importance.

"What have you to do that cannot very well wait?" asked Claire.

"Nothing; and that is why I am taking a rest now," said Frida, pertly, but before her sister could respond, she sprang up delightedly—"Here comes Monica," and in another moment she had darted to the hall door to welcome her friend. "Oh, you dear thing," she said, rapturously, hugging her, and dragging her towards the morning room, "it is so stupid to-day, we are all tired after our dissipation, and Claire is horribly cross."

"Claire cross?" echoed the lady.

"She is, indeed, and bent on making every one as disagreeable as herself, but of course—"

"Hush!" with a half smile on her lips, Mrs. Hazletine pushed open the door which Frida had left ajar, and found herself in the presence of Aunt Prue and Claire. Miss Escott, mindful of the yester evening's conversation, rose as if half uncertain what her visitor's manner might be, but, however deeply the old lady's words had probed, Mrs. Hazletine had evidently forgiven, if she had not forgotten them, and warmly greeted her.

After some little desultory talk on matters connected with their respective households, Frida broke in—

"Oh, Monica, the ball was just lovely last night, even you would have enjoyed it, every body was there."

Claire looked up smilingly. "Every body in Frida's estimation means Harry Trevellian."

"What a shame," said the girl, good humouredly, though a scarlet flame rushed over the mignonne features. "Well, he was

there, certainly, and he asked particularly after you, Monica."

The lady bowed comically. "I am sure I am deeply indebted—who else was there?"

"Every body," cried Frida again, enthusiastically. "You needn't smile, Monica, Lady Watson and both the girls, and Mrs. Bertram, and Bobby Drew, and Mrs. Trollope, with that wretched looking niece she drags about with her, and the usual number of wall-flowers, whom nobody looks at, and pretty girls whom all the men quarrel over, and—I think that's about all—oh, no, that big, clumsy Captain Witherington."

It was Claire's turn now to look aggrieved. "I am sure I don't know why you should speak of him in that way—he did not trouble you much—never danced with you once," she said.

"I should think not, indeed," pouted Frida, "the last time I wore a new dress, he tore half the flounce off, entangled his own

elephantine feet in it, and flung me into the arms of some weak-minded young man, who evidently did not know what to do with me, and I believe I should finally have floundered ignominiously on the floor, had not Bobby Drew compassionately come to the rescue. Not that that little *contretemps* prevented him from asking me last night, but I told him I was engaged for every dance, and suggested, seeing his disconsolate look," slyly, "that he should console himself with Claire, and I remarked that he nobly performed my behest, and luckily Claire's salmon silk escaped his manœuvres."

Claire disdained to reply, though she would have given a good deal if Frida had been a few years younger, that she might have administered a sound box on the ear for her impertinence! Claire never quarrelled, to stoop to any thing so unlady-like was quite beneath her, and where she felt she could not keep her temper, she wisely held her tongue.

Mrs. Hazletine shook her head reprovingly—"You won't get me to credit you, saucy child," she said, "Colonel Witherington is one of Claire's warmest partisans, I know, and a great admirer, *n 'est ce pas?*"

The girl drew herself up a little. "Oh, I don't know," she replied, indifferently, "we are very good friends, and I have known him some time. He is an exceptionally clever and agreeable man, in my opinion."

"Perhaps it is because I am not clever that I do not like him," remarked Frida, honestly meaning what she said, but she was sorry for having spoken a moment later, for Claire remarked, dryly—

"I daresay, his conversation would be quite wasted on you."

"Frida," interrupted Monica, "I cannot stay long this morning. I only just came over to ask if you will dine with us this evening. Godfrey will bring a gentleman home with him, but with that exception we shall be

alone. If you are not too tired, I should like you to come, dear."

"I am never too tired to come to 'The Grange,' Monica. Thank you; I am sure I shall enjoy it."

"Well, then" (rising and shaking hands with Aunt Prue), "I will say good morning. Mind you are punctual—six o'clock" laughing, (for one of the young lady's greatest failings was her want of punctuality).

"Now don't begin to scold, Monica," she said, making a wry face as she walked down to the gate with her friend; "I get plenty of that in there," with a backward movement of her fair head towards the house, "and, to tell the truth, it becomes a little monotonous."

"Then you should not deserve it," said Monica.

"I don't think I always do," replied the girl, a trifle rebelliously. "I know I am very tiresome and provoking sometimes; still, it is not every one who can expect to be as

faultless as Claire, and one such piece of perfection in a family is enough."

Mrs. Hazletine spoke, gravely—

"What a chatterbox you are, child; I doubt if you know half the time what you are talking about," looking fondly into the piquant face. "There, good-bye, my darling; I have wasted much more time than I intended, and must walk quickly to make up for it. Remember, six o'clock," with a last adieu and wave of the hand as she closed the gate after her.

Winifred Escott leant over and peered after her friend, and as she turned to walk back to the house, she said to herself, "I wonder who is going to dine at 'The Grange' this evening? Monica did not say—that was unlike her—and I quite forgot to ask."

CHAPTER VI.

"Curious fool, be still;
Is human love, the growth of human will?"

UNDER the glittering chandeliers, in her richly furnished drawing room, stood Monica Hazletine. She was simply, yet tastefully, dressed in black net, trimmed sparingly here and there with embroidered rose-buds; a tiny spray of the same nestling in her ruddy hair, which flashed and flickered like a living thing, as the rays of light fell upon it.

A moment she stands thus, then advances, with outstretched hands, to greet her husband's friend, Nugent Monroe. He bows low, muttering some conventionality, and with a nervous manner, altogether unlike the

usually self-possessed and dignified being she is wont to be, she moves across the room, and motions him to a seat beside her.

"Has not Godfrey come home yet?" he asks.

"I believe so. I thought I heard his step some time since."

They are alone, and there is no one to rebuke him if his eye rests admiringly, nay almost tenderly, on the drooping eyelids, and bowed queenly head. Of late a certain shyness and consciousness has marked her converse with the man beside her, but it in no way detracts from the charm of her proud beauty. For three years past no man or woman has seen that half imploring, wholly gentle expression on the cold, calm, aristocratic features; her mask fits well, and rarely, even in the privacy of her own chamber, is it thrown aside. What is there in the quiet figure of the man beside her to cause her to catch her breath with quick,

hurried gasps, to send at lightning speed the fevered blood through the sluggish veins? Ah, who can tell! Not Monica Hazletine herself. Nugent Monroe has a certain *débonnaire* handsomeness it is true; yet, after all, he is but a type of many of England's gentlemen, rather under than over the usual height, slimly made, but admirably well-proportioned, with head well set on somewhat stalwart and broad shoulders for his height and size, and sleepy, lazy, insouciant eyes, shaded by dark lashes of almost feminine beauty and length—that is all; quite an ordinary good-looking man, not to be compared in point of handsomeness with Monica's husband. But Nugent Monroe, much as he admires—nay, we had almost used a stronger term—would almost as soon have thought of taking a journey to the moon, as of making love to his neighbour's wife. The *on dits*, the scandal such a step would involve, alone would deter him, to say

nothing of the inner, better nature of the man, that would stay his hand from so base and unmanly an action.

No one had accused Nugent Monroe throughout his eight-and-twenty years of acting in an ungentlemanly manner. What sins might be laid to his charge were skilfully hidden from the light of day, and the ken of man. One lesson he had conned early in life—never to put himself in the power of any human being. Very wise in his generation was Nugent Monroe. Of the many girls to whom his languishing glances and honied flatteries were addressed, how many could have told how he had said everything tender to them, except the final words which had ever remained unspoken, and thus they had not the right to bid him return when he chose to ride away, because the game of love-making had been carried on under the garb of friendship? But though he was wont to speak very frankly of his being a

non-marrying man, that fact did not prevent him sipping the sweets from any flower he listed, and culling the fresh impulses of a woman's heart, only to throw it aside to wither, when he should tire of it. No woman, save one, could tax him with infidelity, and her he banished from his thoughts as much as possible. Perhaps few men had wrought more mischief, or broken more hearts, than Nugent Monroe; yet no indignant pater-familias ever asked his intentions, for the simple reason that he disclaimed any, and by frankly acknowledging that he was a flirt, disarmed anger. There was but one woman living who had the right to call him to account.

"Ah! here you are, Monroe."

The young man rose and grasped the hand of Monica's husband.

Presently Frida came in, hurried, apologetic, excusing herself for being a little late.

"And after all your injunctions, too, Monica," she said, wistfully.

"Never mind," replied her friend. "Godfrey was not in, so it did not make a bit of difference. The gong has not yet sounded."

Frida glanced a trifle discontentedly at her opposite neighbour, as they ranged themselves round the dining table.

"*Only* Mr. Monroe," she said to herself. "I wish I had not put on my new muslin."

To tell the truth, the young lady had dressed herself with more than ordinary care, weaving a pretty little romance the while, and believing in her wise little heart that she could guess the reason for Monica not having mentioned the name of her guest; and when, with palpitating heart and flushed cheeks, she raised her eyes to find "only Mr. Monroe," she felt herself very much injured and ill-used.

Dinner dragged wearily to a close—conversation lagged—Godfrey had a headache; Monica, usually so brilliant in society, and such an amusing companion, sat quiet, crumbling her bread into tiny fragments with

trembling fingers; and Frida, with sudden perverseness, bent her head over her plate, and replied in monosyllables to Mr. Monroe's efforts to unseal her pretty pouting mouth.

The onus of conversation fell on the visitor's shoulders, and although he tried bravely to keep up the current, he, too, at length relapsed into spasmodic queries, and and felt extremely bored.

Mrs. Hazletine's dinner was certainly not a success.

"Dry or sweet champagne, Miss?"

Frida actually started, for her thoughts were far away, and she brought herself down to every day life, with a little pettish *moue.*

"Frida, you have disabused my mind of an erroneous belief!" remarked Godfrey. "I did not think it possible that you could keep quiet for ten consecutive minutes."

"I suppose I do not show to advantage among such brilliant companions," answered the girl demurely.

Monica shook her head, gravely.

"Your quick tongue will get you into disgrace one of these days," she said.

Frida opened her eyes.

"One of these days! Why, it is an every day affair," she cried, comically.

Nugent looked across the handsome china bowl of big creamy roses, which perfumed the room, at his *vis-a-vis*, inwardly admiring the petite figure and childish simplicity of the girl, but the feeling was a very transient one, and his eyes soon strayed back to his beautiful hostess.

"Yes, she is pretty, this fair haired child," he told himself, "but how any man can stoop to cull such an insignificant little hedge-rose, while the stately lily is within reach, passes my comprehension."

With the dessert, came little Marguerite, exquisitely dressed in a white lace frock, tied on the shoulders with palest blue. Her father took her from the nurse, and for a moment

she nestled her curly head contentedly against his breast, and buried her chubby, dimpled hands, in his luxuriant whiskers; but, catching sight of Frida, her whole face broke into smiles. "Auntie Frida," struggling valiantly to be released.

The mother's heart turned cold within her, and a big lump rose in her throat, and threatened to choke her, but she subdued the unutterably hungry longing and vast yearning that prompted her to snatch the little one from Frida's hold, and cry out of the bitterness of her soul, "she is mine—mine." She watched calmly the little head resting on Frida's bosom, took note of the tiny dimpled shoulders pressed closely to Frida's heart, watched the baby fingers twine round the jewelled one, and the wondering, innocent eyes, grow bright at the sight of the glittering ear-drops. Watched all with a smile on her face, and a cruel pang at her heart. Yet, when her visitor addressed himself to her,

and she was vaguely aware that he was asking her if she were not proud to possess such a lovely child, she turned a cold, hard face, towards him, as she answered—

"It is impossible to tell how a child will grow up. I think Rita will be a pretty girl, but I have seen far more beautiful children than she is, grow up almost plain."

"She is very like you," he said again, his eyes resting on the drooping lids which were already closing over the baby eyes, the flushed cheeks that told their tale of coming sleep, even while one small hand held the lace, all crumpled up, to preserve the rosy cheeked apple which Frida had given her. "How proud you must be of her! is she not a great comfort to you?"

"I do not think babies are ever much of a comfort," laughed Monica, "they are more likely to be an anxiety and worry. You need not look so indignant, Frida. I do not care for children in the abstract, as you know."

With this glib falsehood on her lips, she rose from the table, suffered Frida to gather the sleepy little Marguerite closely to her, and they left the room.

"What could possess you to be so stupid this evening?" she said, when, the babe dismissed, they were once again alone. "I particularly wanted you to be your brightest and best."

"Did you?" absently. "I think I did my full share of talking. I never saw you so unlike yourself, Monica."

"I was tired," she responded briefly.

"Come," laughed Frida, "I have more claim to put in that plea than you have, for I danced till four o'clock this morning."

"And I never closed my eyes the live-long night," Mrs. Hazletine might have answered, but it would have provoked comment, and she forbore.

Some half hour later, the gentlemen left their wine, and joined the ladies, and Nugent Monroe at once directed his steps to where

his hostess sat, with a request for a "little music."

She rose with a certain amount of alacrity, and, turning over the music that lay scattered on the top of the grand-piano, she sat down before the instrument. Running her hands over the keys, she asked, looking up at Nugent Monroe—

"Have you any favourites?"

He selected one, and placed it before her. It was the old fashioned, but never-wearied of, Irish ballad, "Kathleen Mavourneen." Monica Hazletine possessed a singularly sweet voice, although she was not a finished musician, never having devoted sufficient time and pains to improve herself in the art, but she sang sufficiently well to please her listeners to-night, and the hand with which Mr. Monroe turned the leaves visibly trembled.

When she ceased there was a slight pause, broken by Godfrey's voice—

"Monica, do you remember that pretty

little thing you used to sing to me before we were married?"

"That is rather a vague description," she answered. "I have so many songs."

Her tone is light and careless, and the softened expression which had heightened so wondrously the beauty of her face, is gone. So easy a thing is it to dissemble after three years of practice. Monica Hazletine was an adept in the art.

"That woman would make her fortune on the stage," was the thought that flitted through Nugent Monroe's brain, "it is a pity Nesta has not her pliability, and adaptiveness."

But she is turning over her music, and Frida exclaims—

"I know which Godfrey means, 'Drifting!' You remember it, Monica?"

"Yes, I know it without my notes," she says. "I need not trouble you, Mr. Monroe."

Was it a subterfuge to rid herself of his presence? he wondered.

"Vainly I've grasped for sunbeams,
Shadows are all I hold."

The curiously plaintive wail that swept through the words haunted one, at least, of her listeners, for days afterwards; then she caught up the refrain, singing, almost beneath her breath—

"Fearfully here I'm treading,
Wearily here I wait,
Beautiful angel wardens,
Open the golden gate."

Earnestly, as if it were a prayer, it fell from her lips. Even Godfrey was moved. He came over to her side, and stooped his handsome head—

"Monica, I do not think I like that song so much as I used to do," he said, "you sing it too well—almost as if you *meant* it, wife!"

Meant it?—almost as if she meant it!

For a moment her heart swelled within her, and she had well-nigh cried aloud that she did mean it, that she did feel it, that she prayed,

night and morning, that the golden gates might open and take her in—shut out the cold world for ever, the cruel conventionalities which had held her captive, nipped and starved her love, until it had broken her heart.

She rose from the music-stool, and Frida took her place, and, in the midst of the noisy morceau that young lady wrung from the ivory keys, the carriage was announced. Frida was not sorry that the evening had come to an end, for it had been a little slow, and stupid. "But everything would seem tame after the delightful time we had last night," she thought.

Monica is released at last, the gentlemen are going to have a smoke in Godfrey's library, and she bids them good night, with a sigh of relief. She is alone, and big sobs rise in her throat, and her lips quiver, as they did when she was a girl, quiver piteously, and she hides her face quickly in her hands, with

an involuntary gesture of shame. Heaven help her, for she has turned a new page in her life's diary, and on its fair, snowy surface, she reads that there is a depth of degradation before her to which she has not yet fallen.

She has deemed herself invulnerable, believing that no arrow in the battle of life could find a weak place in the armour she has worn so long—that all feeling has been quenched and strangled within her—but, ah me! there is a power she has not guessed at, a species of trial that she, of all women, has least dreaded—and the hour has come, the temptation is at hand, and how is she to meet it? Has she the strength and moral courage to rise and do battle with her passionate, impulsive nature again? She must, she must, for the new love that is dawning on her soul, is no longer pure, holy, and legitimate, and to nurture it will be a crime in the eyes of her Maker, and her fellow men. When Godfrey Hazletine presumed to prune and train his

wife's love for him, cut it down, rebuke, and thrust it back upon itself, he did not pause to think how it might rise, Phœnix-like, from the ashes of ruined hope, and bloom again for another than he, nor did he dream that the day would come when he must pay a heavy penalty for his interference with, and scorn of, the highest blessing the great God had given him—the dearest treasure his life would ever know. Yet, as Monica Hazeltine lays her aching head upon the pillow, she realizes that a new joy has of late sprung into being, that the life that has been so long desolate may be beautified, if she will but stretch out her hand to cull the golden fruit that hangs within her reach—that what her aching heart has yearned for so unceasingly, may be hers if she wills it so—that the love her husband has scorned and trifled with, is no longer his, has drifted, ebbed away—is no more there, a thing of the past; the affection that was turned aside from its legitimate course has

found a new outlet, can gladden another earth—that the love he neglected, and passed by, has become the richest boon another heart can crave!

She turns on her pillow, and prays, as never in her life she prayed before, that God will not lead her into temptation, but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape.

CHAPTER VII.

"Listen! I'll tell you what happened,
The same happens every day;
Somebody told me he loved me,
And I gave my heart away."

A COLD, frosty morning, every shrub and tree clothed in myriad gems, the earth carpeted with soft white snow. Winifred Escott told herself it was a splendid morning, as she walked on bravely through the yielding snow under the elms, which as the sun wooed them softened and melted into tears, on, on, where was the little lady bound? In her black velvet dress and *sonsie* hat, with its cream-coloured plume, she looked very pretty, plodding on right manfully, picking out the trodden paths, in preference to the moist white carpet.

Surely it is a rendezvous to which she is hastening, for she paces some twenty steps, then retraces them, and anon once more goes over the same ground.

"Will he never come?" she says impatiently, giving a tiny stamp with her little foot, "I shall not wait much longer, for I begin to fear I shall not see him."

But she does not mean a word of what she says, she knows he will come, and she would suffer a very much longer exposure to the cold and frost, before she would go home again. Her little face softens and flushes, as she recalls the day nearly a week ago, when her boyish lover, having won from her lips an acknowledgment of her love for him, made her promise to meet him here under the frost-laden elm trees this morning. Twelve o'clock was the hour, and it is but just striking from the church tower, as for the third time she retraces her steps.

A moment later, and her hands are grasped

tightly, and a frank, good-humoured face looks down into hers, and says—

"So you came my darling! I knew you would. Oh, Frida, my best beloved, have you thought well over all I said to you, last Tuesday?"

"Yes, Harry," she whispers shyly.

"And you will give yourself to me?" he asks again, and once more she coos her reply—

"Yes, Harry."

"God bless you, my precious one." And before Frida can prevent him, had she been so minded, he has stooped his brown head over hers, and taken the first love kiss from her fresh young lips. But there was no one to see them, nothing in sight save a solitary bird soaring far overhead; and if there had been, do you know, I think Frida and her lover were so happy just then, that they would not have minded it.

Ah, love, young love, the only one that

dares to laugh at prudence, or to put the laws of Mrs. Grundy at defiance. Oh, love, delirious, intoxicating, self-absorbing love, which only to the young, is a thing set quite apart from the world's trammels, and which turns a deaf ear to the sarcasm of society, so happy and complete in itself, as to render its captives oblivious of the fact that the world contains other beings save they two only!

The moments pass in a pleased bewilderment on Frida's part, and a sense of elation and joy on that of her lover, then she breaks the silence, "Harry, what will papa say? do you think he will mind?"

"Mind what? losing you, do you mean? I should think so indeed, but you know it would have to come some day, he could not expect to keep you to himself always"—with happy logic.

"No, but"—hesitatingly, "perhaps he may think me rather young."

"Young, not a bit of it; my mother was only a year older than you when I was born, think of that! Oh, Frida, when you come to the 'Hall,' I will show you her picture, she was so beautiful!"

A glad anticipation dawns before the girl, of the grand old Hall, and she herself as its mistress, which deepens as her lover continues. "I don't know whether my father would consent, but I should think he would, to let me re-decorate and re-furnish a suite of apartments for you, my darling," pressing the little gloved hand, which long ago he had taken possession of, and drawn within his arm; "you know," confidingly, "my father is very—very—is of a saving turn of mind, and there is so much necessary outlay on the estate, that he is always loth to do more than he need, but," looking into the shy, blushing face, "he can scarcely refuse such a request, for he has always promised that when I married, my bride should come to the Hall."

"Oh, I don't care," she cries eagerly, "indeed, Harry, I don't mind one bit about that, I—I—rather like old-fashioned things." She does nothing of the sort, but she is sadly afraid of making trouble, and she has heard what all the county side know, that Squire Trevellian is very mean and miserly, even if she gives no credit to the report that he is a most obstinate and disagreeable old man.

He looks tenderly on her, guessing well the reason of her newly acquired love of old things, but determining in his heart that she shall have apartments fit for her own dainty little self, even if he has to wring it out of his Father.

But there is something more important that he will have to secure, before this question can be mooted, and a chill creeps over Frida's sunny spirit, as she remembers curious tales of old Mr. Trevellian's eccentricities.

"Suppose," she says, "suppose that your father should not approve of our marriage."

"Suppose!" incredulously, "if we begin to suppose, Frida, we shall not know where to stop, set your heart at rest, little one, my father is as fond of bright, pretty faces as I am, and he will learn to love you almost as dearly as I do, some day, see if he doesn't. He has never thwarted me in anything in my life."

Harry Trevellian spoke truly, not realizing how he had never yet wished to do anything contrary to the old man's commands. It is no merit to be amiable, where you are never crossed, and any one can be good-natured, who always has his own way. This, poor Harry had yet to learn, at the present moment he is as undaunted and sanguine as it is possible for a young man of two and twenty to be, when newly betrothed to as charming and pretty a girl as Frida Escott; and the cloud that had rested for a moment on her bright spirit, melted away in her lover's confidence, and she also looked

through brightly tinted spectacles, at the life that stretched before them.

"Darling, you are sure you never loved any one before?" urges the young man, with all a lover's importunity, as the girl announces for the twentieth time, her resolve to wend her steps homeward.

She lifts her bonny young face to his, and in the clear eyes he sees himself mirrored, as she answers softly—

"I love you with all my heart. I never cared for any one else in the way you mean."

"Say after me, 'I will take you for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer.'"

"No," she laughs saucily, the mischievous nature which this new feeling has sobered for the nonce, peeping out again, "the time has not come for that, Mr. Harry."

"I don't intend to wait very long," he says, catching her hands again, "one moment, Frida, you are in a desperate hurry to be off; when can I come to see Captain Escott?"

"Any time," she answers, looking down,

and tracing sibylic designs in the snow with the toe of her little Balmorals, "but perhaps you had better come in the evening, he is never out then."

"I wonder if I could manage it to-morrow," he says thoughtfully, "I might call in as I came back from Firsby, I am obliged to ride there on business for my father."

I cannot tell you how many times they found it necessary to say, "good-by," and how often they loosed hands only to reclasp them; doubtless you have been through it all at some period in your own life, and can well imagine it, perhaps they never would have finally parted, had not carriage wheels startled them, and with one last hearty grasp, Harry Trevellian dropped the hand of his lady love, and plunged in among the snow-laden shrubs, while Frida Escott demurely continued her walk along the high road.

Her heart beat quick and fast, and she reached home with a heightened colour, which

made her look uncommonly pretty, so much so, that Captain Escott, who happened to be in the dining room, when she peeped in on her way upstairs, called to her to come and kiss him. She did so, pressing her bright, cold cheek against his withered one.

"Where have you been, you little witch?" asked the old gentleman; "and which of your lovers must I call to account for pinching your cheeks?"

"No one," she said, disengaging herself blushingly.

Claire caught a glimpse of her confusion, and asked, "Did you not meet any one you knew, Frida?"

"Yes," she answered reluctantly, "I met,—that is to say—I, I saw Mr. Trevellian."

"Oh!" was her sister's only response, but Frida felt that it was a very expressive "Oh," indeed.

"Met Mr. Trevellian, did you say, my dear?" asked her father, "I had no idea he

was strong enough to go out. I understood he was a great invalid, and rarely went beyond——"

"No, Papa," corrected the girl, with burning cheeks, "not the old man, it was the young one. I mean it was young Mr. Trevellian whom I saw."

"Oh, quite a different case," laughed the old captain, quizzically, "I daresay he is a great deal nicer, isn't he, little one? old people don't count for much when they have strapping young sons to do the love-making, and say the pretty speeches for them—eh?" chuckling to himself.

"Brother, what nonsense you are talking to that child," interposed Aunt Prue, primly.

"Am I, my dear?" good-humouredly, "you like nonsense, don't you, Frida? we are not so clever, you and I, but that we can enjoy a little fun once in a while—eh?"

Released at length, the girl sped to her room, and sat down to still the rapid beating

of her heart, and cool her face before she made her appearance again in the family circle.

Lunch was over, and Frida stood discontentedly looking out of the window, for it was snowing fast, and she had made up her mind to go up to "The Grange" this afternoon and confide all her love story to Monica's sympathizing ears, but, alas, the morning that had been so bright and auspicious, had clouded over, and big flakes fell thick and fast. Frida was not superstitious, had she been so, the omen would not have tended to raise her spirits, but luckily she never thought how the new life which had commenced that morning for her, joyous and sunny as it looked just now, might become overcast and end in sorrow and tears. No, she rarely looked beyond the present moment, and that of itself was quite sufficient to call a frown to the pretty features.

"Frida, I wish you would settle down to something, and not fidget so," cried Claire at

last, and indeed there was some cause for the complaint, for twenty times at least had she gone from the side window to the bay, and from the bay window back again, in the dim hope that things might look more cheering on the other side of the house.

"I want to go out," she said.

"You can't think of such a thing, this afternoon child," said Miss Escott.

"Besides you were out all the morning," continued Claire, pausing in her work to look searchingly into her sister's face, but Frida turned away with an angry movement.

"Where did you want to go?" asked her aunt again.

"To see Monica," replied Frida.

"Well," cried Claire, "I am sure if that is all, you needn't make such a fuss about it, you can do that any day in the week, to-day, or to-morrow, it makes very little difference which."

"How do you know?" asked Frida, tartly,

"as it happens I want to go especially this afternoon, no other day will do as well."

"Monica was here last night, what can have chanced since then, that you should want to tell so particularly." Claire spoke suspiciously.

"Sister mine, you are too clever by half," responded Frida, "but, for such a prodigy, you make wonderful mistakes sometimes: I never said I had anything to *tell* Monica, I merely said I wanted to see her, and so I do, and I only wish 'The Grange' was a little nearer than it is, and I would go every day."

"Fortunate for Mrs. Hazeltine that it is not," dryly replied her sister.

"Frida," spoke Aunt Prue, "I can't think how it is, my dear, that when you are in the room we always have disputes. I fear you are growing sadly unamiable. Claire and I sit here a whole morning alone, and never an unpleasant word occurs, but directly you come in, there is sure to be wrangling at once."

Tears sprang to Frida's eyes. She was used to being found fault with, but she had been so happy and elated that morning, and was still in such a state of excitement, that a few words were sufficient to rouse her wrath. She walked across the room in as dignified a manner as it was possible for so *petite* a being to assume, and when she reached the door, she turned and made a mock curtsey to her aunt and sister—"Since you are so happy together, I will rid you of my presence, and leave you to the enjoyment of your own charming society," she said hotly, vanishing on the instant.

"Dear, dear, I don't know what has come to Winifred of late," sighed Miss Escott, "she really is more unmanageable than ever she was, and less to be trusted, more wilful I mean than when she was a child, and the way that John spoils her is something dreadful. Just look at the unbecoming way she left the room, and I am sure I did not find fault without cause, and so long as she persists

in doing what I think is wrong, she must submit to reproof."

"I do not understand it," said Claire, pricking her needle in and out of the canvas that lay on her lap. "I should have supposed that sheer gratitude alone would have prompted her to be more amiable and courteous —gratitude to you, for all your care of her —of us."

"You are a good girl, Claire, I wish that Winifred would take example by you," sighed the simple-minded old lady.

"My nature is very different to Frida's, aunt," remarked Claire pensively, and a trifle conceitedly. "My heart and reason alike would forbid my acting in such a way." At that moment, Captain Escott put his head in at the door, asking,

"Are you there, my darling?"

"No," responded Claire, "she went out of the room in a temper, and I don't know where she is."

"Frida!" called the old gentleman at the

foot of the stairs, "I am going to sort my minerals, will you come and help me?"

In another moment Frida's blythe voice made itself heard, signifying her readiness, and until dinner time they were shut up in the library, hard at work.

The dear old captain—how his little daughter loved him! every now and then dropping her stones, and going over to his side to inflict a hug upon him, or a kiss on the top of his silvery head, and certainly if Claire and Aunt Prue had a happy time of it in the dining room, Frida and her father enjoyed themselves no less. And through it all, there was an under-current of glad delight stirring at the young girl's heart, of a supreme joy at the rich treasure of love which had fallen to her share, and pleased anticipation of a still deeper happiness that would be hers in the future; and the old man sorted his minerals, and joked with his daughter as blissfully ignorant as she herself could be of the shoals and

quicksands ahead. And thus the first day of Frida's betrothal spent itself, and she laid her head on the pillow at night, exuberantly joyful, blissfully content, and if her nightly visions were not of Harry, it was most assuredly not the little dreamer's fault.

CHAPTER VIII.

"My poverty but not my will consents."
ROMEO AND JULIET.

"Why is it that those we love and cling to with the deepest adoration of our unschooled nature should be the first to whet the steel, and bury it in the warm blood that passionate love have created?"
From "INFELICIA."

"JUDITH—Judith, my dear, are you not coming downstairs?"

Mrs. Hargrave has knocked twice at the door of her daughter's room, and receiving no response, she turns the handle and walks in. Judith is busily engaged in twining a ruby-coloured ribbon among her dark hair, and she turns impatiently.

"I am coming. Frank can wait, can't he?"

"Well, I don't know," said her mother; "he seems to be in a hurry."

"All right."

Judith flung the brush on the dressing table, and descended the ricketty staircase.

"What does Frank want, I wonder?" she said, thoughtfully, as she entered the dingy little parlour, which answered the purpose of both dining and drawing room, at No. 14, Paradise Road, Clapham.

Catching sight of a stalwart figure, standing with its back to her, looking out of the grimy, rain-stained window, she gave a sudden affected, little start.

"Oh, it is you, Frank," she said.

"Did not your mother come and tell you I was here?" he answered, surprisedly. "She said she would, for I have only a few moments to spare, Judith."

"What is the matter?" asked the girl, coquettishly. "I don't suppose you came for the simple purpose of seeing me!"

"Why not?" he asked again. "You know, dear, I should come a great deal oftener if I could get away."

"Oh, I daresay," tossing her head, "however, I manage to exist without you."

He drew her towards him, and looked down on the face, which, though a trifle coarse for the nineteen summers which alone had passed over it, had yet a certain defiant beauty of its own. Her eyes, restless and bright, glanced saucily up at him; and he was not such a bad looking fellow either, though somewhat ungainly and awkward. Six foot three stood Frank Allington, and his shoulders, though broad, were higher than was absolutely requisite, and his legs were long and gave him a curious shambling appearance when he walked, which certainly did not add to his charms; still his face, which was beardless and whiskerless, although he had attained his twenty-third year, was bright and good-looking enough; his dark eyes were keen and

piercing, and he had a bonny smile when he chose to call it forth.

"Judith, you can guess why I have come this afternoon," he says. "I—I heard a report that you were going to leave Clapham—leave for good and all—but I did not believe it. I knew you would not take such a step without consulting me; but as I have neither seen nor heard from you for a week, I determined to come up to-day, and ask how the foolish rumour originated."

"It is quite true," she said, doggedly. "I am going to stay six months, perhaps longer, with Uncle Ben, at Leverton."

The young man drew a deep breath before he answered.

"And you did not think it worth while to tell me of this—to ask my opinion on it?"

She met the reproach in his tone with defiance.

"No, why should I?" but though the bold black eyes looked rebelliously into his

sad face, the dimples deepened and laughed around her mouth.

"You can ask me why?" he replied. "Oh, Judith, have you then so soon forgotten what you promised nearly two months ago? I almost think sometimes that you did not mean it—that it was a joke—a very cruel one, Judith—I do, dear. When I am alone and get to thinking of you, I feel that there has been a mistake somewhere, and that as you act in such a strange manner, you wish me to understand that you regret the past, and wish to be free."

"Don't speak so, Frank."

In a softened tone, the girl lays her hand on his, and he tightens his grasp of it as he continues, huskily—

"Now, Judith, we must come to an understanding—either you are, or you are not, bound to me—either you do, or you do not, love me—which is it? Is our engagement to be considered binding, or while there is yet

time to change our minds, had we better do so ?"

She hesitates, growing rosy red, and trying to release her fingers from his hold, but his anxious eyes searching her petulant face tell how he is in terrible earnest, and he adds—

"You will not have to wait long, dear, not nearly so long as we thought at first. I have good news for you—don't you want to hear it ?"

She turns to him then, with parted lips and expectant eyes.

"Dr. Kime has offered to take me into partnership at the end of the year, if I can bring a thousand pounds into the practice; and this I am sure of, for I have friends both willing and able to assist me. And by and by—who knows ? for the old man is growing much enfeebled—it may all fall to me. Think of that, Judith ! Could you be content with Dr. Kime's income—eh ?"

"I will tell you when you have it," she made reply.

"No, Judith, you will do nothing of the kind," a grave smile stealing over his face at the coquettish tone. "No, my dear, you must make your decision now. Is it so hard a thing, Judith," with a great yearning trembling in his voice, "to make up your mind? Can you really have forgotten all you vowed to me only a few short weeks ago? Nay—if your love is so fickle and inconstant a thing, it were not worth an honest man's coveting; and we had better part now, before further harm be done, lest one life at least be wrecked beyond repair."

But she suddenly threw herself into his arms, with bright drops glittering on her lashes.

"No, no," she cried. "I did mean it—I do mean it, only—you are so stern; you almost frighten me sometimes. You—you don't understand me, Frank."

Understand her! He must have been a very much more clever man than he was, to have comprehended the intricacies of that giddy, frivolous, little heart, shallow though it was; the narrow-minded nature and subtle brain, would have baffled a far wiser man than he who loved her with his whole heart and soul.

He had resolved that day to have it out with her, as he had expressed it; to know exactly how things stood between them; and although fully determined that he would no longer be trifled with, he had never realized, until the moment when she lay, subdued and quiet, enfolded in his arms, how much it would have cost him to give her up.

Presently she says—

"You know, Frank, I cannot help going to Leverton. I am sure, when you hear all about it, you will acknowledge that it is no fault of mine. Uncle Ben came here himself. Only think of that, for he is quite old and

very infirm; but he came expressly to see mamma, and they had a long talk together—oh, hours and hours!—and then I was sent for, and Uncle Ben explained things a little. Mamma is his sister, you know, but many years younger; and it seems that she displeased him very much when she was a girl (by running away with papa, I expect, but he did not say so), and for twenty-one years he has never forgiven her, and never intended to do so. But when Uncle Dick, Uncle Ben's twin brother, died, some two or three months since, he begged of him as a dying request that he would be reconciled to mamma (Leonora, he called her; it sounded so strange), and he had given his word that he would. Mamma sat there crying and sobbing all the time. Then he asked how old I was, where I had been to school, if I had many friends in the neighbourhood, and—oh, heaps of other questions. And I behaved very nicely, for I felt somehow as though a

great deal depended upon that interview. He seemed to take a fancy to me, and told mamma she was to send me over to Leverton Hall in a fortnight's time, on a six months' visit. 'And,' he said, wrinkling up his face in the funniest manner possible, 'if she and I get on well together, Leonora, I have a plan to propose which I shall not explain just now; but if she agrees to it, and she is scarcely likely to do otherwise, why I don't think you will have any need to complain of your brother's tardy reparation.' Mamma kissed me after he had gone, and said that my fortune was as good as made, for that Uncle Ben was very wealthy, and has only one son, and that if I pleased him he would probably leave me something very handsome at his death. I know she felt relieved that I had behaved so well, and I am sure I deserved a little praise, for I felt sorely tempted to laugh out-right two or three times. Uncle Ben is one of the very ugliest, oddest

looking old fellows I ever saw in my life."

"His son?" her lover's quick ears echoed her words, "does he live at home, Judith?"

"How should I know?" indifferently, "he never even mentioned his name before me! what does it matter, Frank?"

"Matter? I think it matters a great deal, if my affianced wife is to be thrown into the society of a good-looking, fashionable young man for six months."

"Now, Frank, how can you tell that he is good-looking or fashionable," saucily. "I have a presentiment that he is five foot nothing, with carrotty locks."

"It does not signify, of course, whether he is handsome or agreeable, seeing that you are engaged, Judith?" questioningly.

"No, I suppose not," demurely, though the dark eyes flashed wickedly.

"I am of a very jealous nature," he whispered, "I have no faith in the love that has

not more or less a *soupçon* of jealousy in its composition. Oh, my dear girl, I wish you were not going."

"Nonsense," she replies, merrily, "if you loved me as you say you do, you would trust me. How do I know what *you* will do, when my back is turned, and yet *I* am not jealous."

"I? oh, you know very well, Judith, that there are few temptations about here, and if there were, I have a talisman, my darling; no woman living could win a glance of admiration from me while I am possessed of your love, nor steal one iota of that which is your due. Can you say this, Judith?"

"I have never been tried," she answers, uneasily, "but I do not know why you should think that I should fall short of your standard."

"I don't, dear; I don't, only the wind itself is not more changeable than you are, never in the same mood for ten minutes together, but, I should not be the happy man

I am this moment if I doubted your constancy; still you *are* a flirt, Judith, and you know it every whit as well as I do, and it will be a struggle to you to deny yourself, and refrain from indulging your propensity. I can only trust that you have the firmness of character and moral courage to do so."

"You appear to think very highly of your bride elect," said the girl, in an offended tone, "I ought to feel flattered."

"Truly you ought," he answered, gravely, "if what I say sounds harsh; remember it is my love alone that dictates it, and you may justly be proud of the entire affection of an honest heart; but, oh, my darling, if only my hands were not so pitiably empty, that I might marry you at once, for I dread this separation more than words can tell."

She hid her face on his shoulder, but in her heart she felt glad that he was not rich enough to do as he had said, and her pulses beat high at the prospect of six months of luxury and idleness.

Judith Hargrave's life had not been an altogether easy one. Her father had risen in the world by means of a happy invention, which had filled his pockets, and converted him from a plodding industrious man into a rich and idle one; but no amount of gold could ever have made him a gentleman, no amount of varnishing polish the rough exterior. What Leonora Trevellian ever could have seen in him to attract her girlish fancy, no one knew, but certain it was, that she left her brother's roof, and called down his fiery indignation upon her head, out of her love for Roger Hargrave. And henceforth, Squire Trevellian washed his hands of his head-strong sister, who had set at defiance his reiterated commands, and contracted such a horrible mesalliance, and for all mention he made of her, she might have been dead and buried. All went smoothly with Mrs. Hargrave during the first ten years of her married life; she had as much money as she knew what to do with, and beneath her husband's rugged exterior

beat a warm and kindly heart, which few guessed at, but which his wife well knew the value of, and she was well content. But as ill luck would have it, Roger Hargrave, at the instigation of a friend, speculated largely in some lead mines. He had a run of good fortune at first, and doubled and trebled the sum he had advanced, but one morning he woke to the knowledge that the crash had come, and that he was seriously involved; but before the whole extent of the calamity was made known, distress of mind had so wrought upon him that he was seized with a paralytic fit and died, leaving his wife and child little less than beggars. Then it was, that "Uncle Dick," as Judith had styled him, came forward, and offered the bereaved woman; material assistance. He could well afford to do so, for he was a man of means, and his heart had always leant towards the sister whose only fault had been, that she had presumed to choose a husband for herself, and refused to acknowledge the right of any one to interfere.

Richard Trevellian once, and once only, ventured to name her to his brother Ben, but the implacable resentment that trembled in the answer—"Hush, Dick! no one must dare to speak of her in my presence—she angered me, and I never forgive!" sealed his lips, and he never pleaded her cause again, until he lay on his dying bed. But in the mysterious presence of the King of Terrors, Benjamin Trevellian dared not refuse, and thus he had pardoned his sister.

Mrs. Hargrave had shed many tears over her brother's death. He had been more than kind to her, liberally bestowing a good education on her child, and helping her in many ways; but he had not, as she had fondly hoped he would, remembered her in his will, and the poor woman's heart sank, as she thought regretfully how much two or three hundred pounds would have done for her, and how little need of it had her brother Benjamin, to whom all Richard's property had lapsed. It would be difficult to express her thankfulness,

when the old squire proffered his friendship and forgiveness, and she glanced at the fifty pound note he had left in her hand at parting, with her whole heart swelling within her with gratitude. The greater part of this sum, it is true, must go towards Judith's outfit, for the wardrobe that pertained to her, as Judith Hargrave, would have been very unsuited to Squire Trevellian's niece. It was a real joy to the anxious mother to be enabled to purchase not only the necessaries, but also some of the elegancies of a ladies' toilet for her child. She had a great deal of good taste which unfortunately Judith did not inherit, for the young lady had a decided leaning towards gay colours and inharmonious contrasts, which was luckily held in check, for Mrs. Hargrave exercised her authority, and Judith had little cause for complaint when she examined the tasty and elegant articles of dress her mother's care had selected.

CHAPTER IX.

" How often—oh, how often,
I had wished that the ebbing tide,
Would bear me away on its bosom,
O'er the ocean, wild and wide!
For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear."

LONGFELLOW.

" HARRY, my lad, I want to speak to you."

The day was drawing to a close, dinner was over at Leverton Hall, and the butler had withdrawn, having placed the rich red wine the squire loved, by his side, and several dishes of fruit upon the shining mahogany.

The young fellow started, for to tell the truth, he was trying to pluck up courage to break the ice, and speak frankly to his father

of the love he bore to Captain Escott's daughter, but each moment he grew more tongue-tied, and the task more difficult.

There was some little excuse for his cowardice, if he were not quite certain as to the manner in which his intelligence would be received, for glancing at the stern face opposite, the tightly-set lips, the sharp eyes under their pent-houses of grizzled over-hanging brows, the thin aquiline nose which almost met the sharply pointed up-turned chin, one could well imagine that Benjamin Trevellian was a man accustomed to having his own way, and were he thwarted, might prove extremely unpleasant.

Harry found himself thinking as he sat there, utterly miserable, and ill at ease, that he had never seen his father look so determined, or so arbitrary before, and yet the plunge must be made somehow. He had seen Captain Escott on the preceding evening, and the dear old man had grasped his hands kindly,

assuring him of his sanction, so be it that he could win that of his father, but, putting him on his honour at the same time, that until *that* was gained, he should hold no communication with Frida, and that the matter should not be spoken of even in the family circle. What could the young man do but promise? He was deeply grateful for Captain Escott's sympathy and kindness, and while in his secret heart he rebelled against the dictum as regarded his lady-love; though he longed for a kiss of the sweet fresh lips, and felt as though the sun had been suddenly extinguished from his sky, when he had passed his word that he would not seek to see her, he yet had the good sense to feel that her father was acting perfectly right in exacting this of him, until the squire should know and approve of the match.

Harry's courage had been going down, down, in a frightful way during the last ten minutes, and when his father peered at him

from under his shaggy brows, and suddenly addressed him, he let fall with a confused start, the pearl-handled dessert knife, with which he had been unconsciously trifling.

The old man chuckled. He was not a pleasant object to behold when he indulged in mirth ; his furrowed cheeks and brow wrinkled themselves into numberless seams, and the sunken eyes, piercing as a hawk's though they were, hid themselves far back in their sockets, until the thin lips closed once again over the toothless gums, and the low guggling chuckle ceased. His son was never quite sure whether he was laughing or choking, and was always heartily relieved when the pantomime ceased.

"Yes, Harry," he said, "I've got a treat in store for you—a treat—ah, ah, ah," drying his eyes with his handkerchief, and coughing and laughing feebly at the same time, "you can't guess what it is—can you now—ah ?"

Well, no, Harry had but a very vague idea

what it could possibly be to arouse his father's mirth in this unseemly manner; so forbore to guess, lest by some unlucky chance he should provoke his ire, and he dare not risk that just now, when so much was at stake.

"No, father, indeed," he said pleasantly, "I haven't a notion."

"Do you want to get married?" chuckled the old man again, "eh? I say, do you want to get married?"

Harry was utterly taken by surprise at this speech. Could Captain Escott have seen his father, and taken the task off his shoulders? No, an instant's reflection showed, that that was a simple impossibility. Had he not said to him, "you may meet with opposition from Mr. Trevellian; unless he is very much changed from what he was when he was as a young man, I think it is more than probable. When we were both little more than boys, I happened to offend him. I

never really understood how it came about, but I need not assure you that it was wholly accidental, and that I did not intend it; but he never forgave me. I suppose it must be fifty years ago, or more, but he has not exchanged a word with me since, and I believe would cut me dead, if he were to meet me in the street, to-morrow."

An uncomfortable sensation stole over Harry, as he recalled the Captain's words, but his father was waiting for an answer; now or never was the time to speak; he drew a deep breath, and then summoning up the courage to look steadily into the shrewd old face grinning opposite to him, he said staunchly—

"Father, you have divined my thoughts; I have been wishing to broach this subject to you, but you have forestalled me. I do wish to marry, though how you have guessed it, I cannot tell."

"You shall have your wish gratified, boy,"

answered the old man amicably, "in a week's time she will be here—six months I said. By jove! six months, and here we are, arranging it all, before she has even seen you, perhaps doesn't know of your existence—ah, ah, ah!"

Harry stared in undisguised amazement. "Coming here in a week's time," he gasped, "what is she coming here for?"

"To keep house for the old man, ah, ah! to make him comfortable, and to fall in love with her handsome cousin Harry."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? ah, ah! what should I be talking of, but pretty Judith with the bright black eyes,—she who is to be your wife—clever stroke that! trust the old man for keen-sightedness to the last," then dropping his tone, and muttering to himself, "I shan't have to part with Dick's money if she marries my boy; 'five thousand pounds to Leonora's girl, Benjamin'—he must have

lost his senses—out of only fifteen thousand, to will away five; but she shall have the benefit of the interest, ah, ah! and the sum down when she marries Hal, that'll make all straight, all straight won't it? ah, ah, ah!" when he suddenly became aware that his son was regarding him with a frightened stare. In very truth did Harry believe his father had gone mad; in no other way could he account for this extraordinary exhibition of mirth, and self-complacency; at length he found voice to interrupt the incoherent ramblings.

"Suppose you just tell me plainly what you mean; who on earth is my cousin Judith? and what possesses you to suppose that I want to be married to a girl I have never seen?"

"Didn't you say you wanted a wife, boy?"

"Yes," assented Harry. "I do want to be married father, if you will give your con-

sent to my winning Captain Escott's daughter, for my wife."

"Captain Escott's daughter?" the old man's querulous tone rose to a shrill scream, then he sobered down, adding with grotesque cunning—"Yes, yes, Hal—all right my boy—I won't be a hard hearted parent, ah, ah, ah! I'll give you twenty thousand pounds on your wedding day, if the lady's father will settle half that amount on her. Fair and just that, ah, ah, ah!"

Down, down went poor Harry's heart. Ten thousand pounds! Well, he did not know exactly how rich the captain was, but he was quite convinced that he had not that sum to spare, and he doubted very much if he were in a position to settle anything on Frida at her marriage, though perhaps she might come in for something at his decease.

Meanwhile Mr. Trevellian senior continued laughing gleefully, until his son could bear it no longer.

"Father, stop that—do you hear?" he cried in a more disrespectful tone than he had ever before used to his parent, exasperating as he was wont to be at times, "at least, if you don't mean to help us, you needn't sit gibing and making fun of me. I have made up my mind to marry Frida Escott, though I don't quite see how it is going to be done. You know very well that her father cannot settle ten thousand pounds on her, but I am not easily daunted for—I love her," and as a vision rose before him of pretty, saucy, bewitching Frida, with the love-light shining in her forge-me-not eyes, he softened imperceptibly. "Father, it is not so very long ago, since you had a help-meet, a dear sweet woman; you loved my mother; will not the old memory make you gentle with the happiness of her only child? My life is bound up in Frida's, father! It would kill me to give her up. I am so young! Think it over again—give the matter more consideration. Have I ever

thwarted you? have I not always been a good and dutiful son? surely you will not refuse this thing, that is so dear to me! Father! Father!" Eloquent were the heartfelt words, stirring, though tremulous, the deep rich mellow voice, but the old man looked on grimly, and indifferently, and hardened his heart. For half an hour longer did father and son sit together, the one firm, unyielding, and unpitying, the other all his assumed bravado melting away, under the sorry look of things, begging, pleading, as if for his very life; and in goodsooth, Frida's love was dearer to Harry Trevellian than ought else the world contained, and life seemed but little worth when bereft of its richest treasure. But it was all in vain, he might as well have appealed to a stone statue, and the young man rose at length in anger, vowing that his father might do his worst, and leave him penniless, for he would never give up Frida Escott's love. Is there need to tell what you can so

well imagine, how Harry went with his hopeless tale to Frida's father, and how he, the dear old gentleman, though he genuinely pitied the young man's unconcealed distress, told him frankly that he could not countenance an engagement unsanctioned by his father, and how he further exacted an unwilling promise, that he should not meet his daughter again; nay how he refused to let them bid each other good-by, though he turned his head away that he might not meet the imploring gaze. "My boy, it is much better and wiser that there should be no last words," he urged; "you will both of you be miserable enough without them, and it would only cause you a great deal of unnecessary pain, without bringing an atom of comfort or consotion to either of you. Sit down there," pointing to his escritoire, "and write a line to her: tell her frankly that your father will not give his consent—that he has other views for you—say what you like; I trust to your honour not

to make her feel more wretchedly than need be, and I will give it to her myself."

So Hal sat down, and wrote those few last lines to his lady-love, bravely striving to keep back the despair which yet breathed in every line—telling her that he yet trusted in time and patience to clear away his father's prejudices, but adding that he gave her back her promise, not holding her in any manner of way bound to him, yet assuring her of his unalterable fidelity. It was a manly, honest, though broken-hearted letter, and when he had written it, he rose from his seat, and left it open on the desk—he was not ashamed that Frida's father should see what he had penned to Frida herself; but the captain folded it without glancing at its contents, and enclosed it at once in a envelope. "Good-by, Harry," he said cordially, "you will get over this smart in time, take my word for it."

But he shook his head, for he could not trust himself to speak, and with sad heart and

lingering feet, he left the house. Frida, who chanced to be standing by the window, saw him go, and wondered vaguely why he had not asked to see her. That there could be anything wrong, she did not dream—so happy and assured was she in her girlish love and trust. While she still stood looking out, her father came quietly to her side, and putting the letter into her hand, said, "Read that, my child, and when you have finished it, come to me in my library."

Wonderingly she opened the envelope, and a sharp pang contracted her heart, as her eye fell on her lover's signature. Why had he written to her when surely he could *tell* her, all he wished to say? and then she read it through,—through to the bitter end, and in a flood of tears she grasped it tightly, striving to glean a crumb of comfort from the loving, earnest words, that told her she was all in all to him, and that he had not yet relinquished all hope of winning her. And there, where

the sunlight flickered on her fair head, the first trial of her short uneventful life fell upon her that bright March morning. With a sudden, swift impulse she springs up, and rushes to the library. It cannot be true! It is some joke, just to try her, she tells herself, as with passionately aching heart, trembling lips, and tear-stained cheeks she finds herself in the captain's presence. He draws her to his side, essaying to check her sobs. It is pitiful to see the small, white face, all drenched with tears, and he is inexpressibly grieved, for he knows the thing to be inevitable.

By and by she looks up indignantly.

"His father will disinherit him if he marries me?" she asks.

And he answers—"Not only if he marries you, my child, but unless he marries his cousin."

"It is hard! oh how hard it is!" she sobs, "and I was so happy one little hour ago," with a certain instinctive pity for herself that is

extremely touching, to witness. "He is a bad cruel old man, and if I were Harry, I wouldn't take any notice of what he says! He has no right to hurt us so."

"Hush, Frida," gently but authoritatively; "Harry is a good son, and bitterly as he feels his father's conduct, he knows that he must not rebel."

"Papa, you will let me see him again?"

The plaintive accents cut to the quick, but he knows that it would but probe the wound in either heart the deeper, and so he answers her,—"No, Frida. Harry has acquiesced in my decision, you must do the same."

She broke out angrily in her misery.

"It is a shame, a cruel shame," with an instinctive crying out against the injustice of it all, and a deep pity for her own little forlorn self, bereft of love and lover. "I shall die if you take Harry from me."

Captain Escott smiled at the childish impotence and wrath—smiled, although he knew

how terribly real it was to his poor little daughter; she who had known neither ache nor pain all her life long, realized how sadly she was being made to suffer; but he rejoiced in his inmost heart that she had, as he believed, all of a child's recuperative nature, and that thus when the whirlwind should have passed, it would leave a calm, that a stronger nature might never hope for, and fresh sunlight would glimmer on her path again. Poor little Frida, almost heart-broken though she is at this moment, he tells himself that hers is not a temperament to sorrow always, and that the very vehemence of her misery and anger will cure it of its sting, and the stormy tempest of tears wash out the bitterness of the aching little heart.

"You are not a bit sorry for me," she cries resentfully. "Papa, papa, don't you see how heart-broken I am? oh, I can't bear it." And yet one little fortnight ago she had no thought of love or lovers, certainly no over-

whelming affection for Harry Trevellian. Captain Escott drew the little head on his shoulder, imprisoning the trembling hands which vainly smote each other, in his own, and—for he was a wise old man—ceased to argue with her, striving to sooth her with his fond caressing words. And by and by, the swollen eye-lids closed—she had sobbed herself to sleep. Poor child! her sorrow was very real while it lasted, very pitiful, very sad, but natures such as hers are not the ones to die of their grief. It is not the noisy, boisterous passionate cry, but the silent ache, the subdued and untold agony, that only heaven witnesses, that saps the life-blood and breaks a woman's heart.

CHAPTER X.

"I had not loved thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

"You will not let any one know," Frida had said; and Captain Escott had promised faithfully that his little daughter's love affair should be kept a profound secret.

But when Frida said "any one," she meant the inmates of her home—Claire and Aunt Prue, she did not include Monica Hazletine. Claire's elevated eyebrows and scornful expression, and Aunt Prue's wondering queries, were what she shrank from; her grief was too new a thing as yet to bear much probing. Had all gone well with her, how elated she would have been, and how unmercifully she

would have teased her sister, at the notion of herself, as a married woman, being entitled to chaperon her. But on the third day after the terrible *denouement* of her little love-episode, the craving for sympathy became so great, that she started for "The Grange," determined to confide all to Monica.

She found that lady alone, sitting beside a table strewn with books.

"A box from Mudie's?" asked Frida, in a lack-interested tone.

At any other time she would have sprung forward in delight, for she was a most desperate novel reader, devouring every work of fiction that fell in her way, and having long ago exhausted the contents of the circulating library at Leverton, was dependent on Monica's weekly box.

Mrs. Hazletine looked up surprisedly, wondering that she should show so little interest.

"Why, my darling," she said, as the white

dejected face met her view, "what has happened to you?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered, trying hard to keep back the tears which threatened to overflow her blue eyes, "Monica; I am so miserable, and I have come to tell you all about it, although I know you cannot bring him back again."

Mrs. Hazletine was alarmed. The girl looked really ill, and for a moment a wild throb shot through her heart that something had chanced to Captain Escott. She dearly loved her guardian, and, somehow, the small circle of those for whom she felt legitimate affection, seemed gradually narrowing.

"Is it anything about dear Guardy?" she asked, quickly; for Monica knew, what neither Claire nor Frida suspected, namely, that at any moment he might be taken from them, that for many years he had suffered from his heart. Perhaps this knowledge had something to do with the gentle, reverent

manner she always assumed to him. It is such an awful thing to feel that the sword of Damocles is suspended over the heads of those we love; it is so paralyzing a sensation to look on the face of the living and to know that but a shortened breath divides them from that unknown world.

But Frida replied—

"Oh, no, Monica, don't you think it possible that I can have a great grief of my *own*, without it belonging to any one at home."

The unconscious tone of wounded *amour propre* revealed volumes.

"Frida, is it about Harry Trevellian?"

"Yes, that is it," and with a burst of tears she flung herself into Monica's arms, and sobbed out the old story, finishing up with, "And I am so miserable. I don't think any one in the whole world ever can have been quite so wretched."

Monica was touched—the girl's grief was wild; and it did seem hard for the child to

have won her lover only to lose him, yet she did not well see what consolation she could offer. To her clear judgment it seemed that there was nothing to be done but to give him up. Now Frida did not see matters at all in that hopeless light; she clung to the fragment of comfort contained in Harry's letter of farewell, in which he had assured her that he would ever be true to her, and still hoped to smooth away the obstacles from their path, and in her inmost soul she fully believed he would do so—it was the separation and uncertainty that she found so hard to bear—and thus, when Monica said, gently—

"It is very sad, darling, but you could not marry him without his father's consent, you know; so you must just put a brave face on it, and made up your mind to live without him," Frida, in a very indignant tone, answered—

"Live without Harry!—how can you say such a thing, Monica! I couldn't live with-

out him any more than he could without me. How can you talk so?"

"Then what are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Hazletine, totally unable to account for the frantic rage and contempt the little lady exhibited.

"I don't know," she said, wearily. "If I might see him, I shouldn't care—at least, not so *very* much," correcting herself; "I could live on hope. But—but—"

"Darling." Mrs. Hazletine spoke very gravely, for she was sorry to see the girl buoying herself up with hopes that she did not believe would ever be realized, and judged truly that disappointment *now* would be infinitely better than months of protracted suspense, and alternate brightened expectations and anon heart sinkings. "Darling, would you rob Harry of his inheritance for the gratification of your love?"

Frida looked up into the sweet, calm features which showed so few traces of the tempest-

tossed and storm-driven soul within; she did not exactly understand.

"Frida, did you not tell me that Captain Escott said that if Harry married you, his father would not leave him a penny of his wealth? Then, how could you *wish* him to do such a thing, knowing what it would entail? How could you, for an instant, face the thought of the black future that would be his, did he in a moment of desperation put away from him the estate and fortune that are his by right for the sake of your pretty little face—would you ever cease reproaching yourself, dear child?"

"That is nonsense, Monica," she said, rebelliously. "He would have *me*, and he loves me very much—much better, I am sure, than he does that damp, dismal-looking old hall."

Monica smiled—so childlessly unreasonable was the forlorn girl, and yet so keenly alive to her own trouble, that she scarcely knew what to say to her.

"Frida," she resumed, after a slight pause, "I think if I loved any one very much, and I knew that my love would do them an irreparable injury, as in your case, dear, that I would strive to attain to that self-abnegating power, the acme and excellence of which love alone is capable of, and stand aloof from him, and—"

"And see him marry another woman?" broke in Frida, hot and indignant. "You might do it, Monica, but I?—never, never!" with a decided shake of her perverse little self.

"But that is not necessary," suggested Mrs. Hazletine. "Mr. Trevellian may not wish his son to marry you, but I scarcely think he could be so unjust as to insist on his marrying any one else."

This was the first crumb of comfort Monica had given her, and Frida snatched at it gratefully.

"You do not think so?"

"No, darling; I think that if Harry fulfils his father's wishes, so far as you are concerned, that when he finds he has relinquished the idea, he will be content."

The girl sighed audibly.

"I hope you may be right," she said, "for oh, it would be dreadful to think of Harry—"

She left her sentence unfinished, gulping back the tears heroically.

"I should not think very highly of Harry Trevellian if he *did* take another woman to wife, while his heart was yours," said Monica, looking down on the pretty, flushed, and eager face, and thinking privately, that could the squire but see his son's lady-love at that moment, his heart must be made of very stern stuff indeed, could he resist the wistful voice, and sweet, sad face.

Frida went home somewhat comforted from her conversation with her friend. "Behind the clouds was the sun still shining"—if some good fairy could but have whispered it to her,

for as she walked slowly along, conning it all over for the hundredth time, she turned a corner abruptly, and stood face to face with Harry himself.

To do him justice, all mindful of his promise and his honour, he would have continued his way; but with a startled cry, the bright light flew to her face, crimsoning it with intense excitement, and she held out both her hands beseechingly.

Harry would have been more than mortal, could he have resisted the radiant, imploring face—he did not do it—he was very human, as you will discover by and by, although he did his best to control his delight at this unexpected rencontre. He could not refuse to take the outstretched hands in his, and stood, looking down on her eagerly, drinking in the fair, sweet, maiden beauty. She had grown inexpressibly dear to him; the love that, nursed, and encouraged, might have slumbered, now that it was defied, and

made so difficult a thing, had become strangely precious.

She was the first to speak. "Oh, Hal, I thought I was never going to see you again, and, I have been so wretched." There was a dreary pathos in her tone hard to bear.

"Poor darling," but even as he held her to him, he added with a quick instinctive honourable feeling, "Frida, we are doing wrong. I gave my word to your father that we would not meet."

She started as if stung, then clung to him again, as she read in his eyes that it was as terrible to him to let her go, as it was for her to leave him, answering pitifully—

"But we did not intend to, it was accidental; papa could not be angry with us for just this tiny minute's talk, and, oh, you don't know how much I have to bear!"

It was very hard to do it. I don't think Harry ever had a notion how hard it would be, until the temptation came.

"I never broke my word in my life," he said; "don't let me look back on my first lapse of honour, as connected with my love for you."

There was something grand and true in her nature after all, weak, and frail, and yielding, though she was, and something in the low, earnest, unselfish tones, struck a right chord in her heart. And perhaps she had never loved him so well as now, when, with beating heart and trembling hands, but firm decision, he bade her go, and she tightened her grasp for a moment, while she whispered, "you are right, good-by," and walked away, with a gladsome feeling of pride in her lover, stirring at her heart amidst its desolation.

CHAPTER XI.

"It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all."
From VIVIEN.

WHEN Harry Trevellian reached home that same afternoon, he found the hall door open, and inside, two or three new trunks were piled one upon the other. In a moment it flashed across him that his cousin Judith had arrived, and his heart sank within him, as he piloted his way amid the shawls and wraps that lay scattered on the floor.

He was already half-way up the oaken staircase, when the library door opened, and his father called, "Is that you, Harry?"

He answered promptly, "Yes."

The introduction had to be effected, he argued; it made very little difference whether it came now, or at a later period; so, steeling his heart, he retraced his steps.

The squire sat in his leathern arm-chair, by the large fire place, in which brightly flickered a fire, although the Spring was already advanced, and the days mild and genial, but old age is chilly, the warm young blood that leaps in the veins at twenty-five, creeps very sluggishly at seventy, and old Mr. Trevellian dearly loved warmth and ease. The room felt hot and close, coming from the bright sun light and clear air without, and for a moment the young man drew a deep breath as though he were suffocated.

Judith Hargrave stood by the window looking out; there was nothing particularly interesting in the view, for the library was situated at the back of the house, and the fields which it overlooked were bleak and bare. Mr. Trevellian rose, and putting his hand on his son's shoulder, said—

"Judith, my dear, here is your cousin Harry."

The girl turned her bright face upon him, and despite the dislike and prejudice which had sprung up within him for this new cousin, this interloper who had interfered so sadly with his plans, and robbed him of his new-found happiness, he acknowledged that she was a handsome girl. And indeed Miss Hargrave had never shown to such advantage before. In her new well-fitting dark maroon dress, stylish mantle, and velvet hat shading the face, that was wont to be too bold and confident, with the new shyness that had come over her, much to her own surprise, at the luxurious surroundings to which she had been so unaccustomed, and the dimples peeping out saucily, as to her infinite delight, she perceived that "Cousin Harry," was likely to prove a by no means despicable acquaintance, she really looked both elegant and pretty.

Judith Hargrave was an unusually clever girl, clever that is to say, in reading human

nature, and she had not been twenty-four hours at the Hall, before she discovered without the aid of a single word from her uncle's lips, that she was destined to be his son's bride, and that if she played her cards carefully, she might remain at the Hall as its mistress.

But with all her cleverness, she could not guess at the love that lay at the bottom of her cousin's heart, nor divine that though he was willing to minister to her amusements, and gratify her caprices, he was oftentimes inexpressibly bored, and that it was as much because he deemed it part of his bounden duty to his father, as from inclination, that he accompanied her in her rides and drives, and spent so many hours by her side.

Harry was too gentle and honourable to vex the old man by an exhibition of his unwillingness, and too true a gentleman to allow a lady to suppose, that it was not his pleasure to wait upon her, and be at her every beck and call.

During the first six weeks of Judith's sojourn under her uncle's roof, the squire chuckled to himself gleefully, believing that his plans had succeeded. Could he have looked into his son's mind, and known the utter sadness that dwelt there, and how very far he was from either forgetting Frida, or cherishing anything save a cousinly regard for his cousin, he would have been very disappointed, to say the least of it. In his wildest imagination, he never dreamed that the young man was patiently biding his time, trusting by gentleness and yielding in part measure, to move the old man's heart, and gain his consent.

Right merry did Judith Hargrave make herself at Leverton Hall; she took her place at the head of her uncle's table, and with ready tact and good humour chatted with the old man, and amused him, thus freeing Harry from the somewhat onerous task, and with a feeling of relief the young man acknowledged

that the long dreary dinners were infinitely less wearisome, now that Judith, well-dressed and pleasant to look upon, sat there, smilingly ready to bandy jest with him, were he so disposed, or to soothe and entertain his father, when querulous and complaining. The young lady herself was well content. No one could complain of a stingy household, and mean *menage*, now that she ruled at Leverton Hall. Somehow the squire loosened his purse-strings more readily, under the influence of a sunny smile, and a coaxing voice, than he had been wont to do when the old housekeeper, who had reigned supreme until Judith's advent, would grimly suggest that unless her master gave her some money to meet sundry bills, they would be having the bailiffs in the house. The table was now well supplied, at little more cost than under the old *regime* of under-done chops, and half-boiled potatoes. To be sure Judith dismissed the cook and engaged a more efficient one,

and the under-housemaid, she took as her own especial maid. Altogether, now that there was a lady at the head of Mr. Trevellian's establishment, Leverton Hall became something more of a home to Harry, and he caught himself thinking once or twice, that there would be less to distress his fair young wife when she should come there as his bride, than in the days when all management was left to the servants. He could not realize that his chances of wedding Frida were more distant than ever, and that the very fact of the comfort they now enjoyed, would strengthen his father in the desire to carry out his original plan, and by inducing Harry to marry his cousin, retain Judith at the Hall for ever.

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What a much happier world this would be, if the well-mated couples could only come together. For one sees the loving husband

tied for life to a cold undemonstrative woman, the passionate voluptuous nature mated with an uncongenial spouse, and one feels such a longing to take the meek, devoted little wife from her big, burly, selfish husband, and wed her to that delicate, feeble young man, whose wife neglects him so, and will not stay at home to look after his comforts. I once remarked to a lady, *apropos* of a couple with whom we were acquainted, that it seemed such a pity that two such bad tempered people should have married.

"Do you think so?" she replied, "I cannot agree with you. I think it is infinitely preferable that only *one* home should be made wretched." I have thought, since then, that there was a great deal of truth in what she said, but unfortunately it is not always the case; in my experience it is a rare instance where both husband and wife *are* ill-tempered. It is oftener that you will find a surly, cross-grained man with a sunny, bright little wife,

and the husbands of strong-minded women, as a rule, are cowed and unassuming; whether they have always been so, or if it be the result of continued matrimonial naggings, I am not prepared to say—perhaps after years spent in wrangling, the unhappy husband learns that discretion is the better part of valour, and yields the palm to his opinionative and loud-tongued wife. And in single life you will find the same. There is Miss Brown, beautiful and high spirited, and she actually looks kindly on the attentions of that little, empty-headed fop, Captain Spooner. Then there is the dashing fast Mr. Wilson, who, we are told on good authority, has proposed for the hand of Miss Jane Dogood, whose whole life is spent in knitting socks for the poor, and teaching in the Sunday schools. It is an anomaly. But such was Judith Hargrave's case, fickle and vain, and foolish, she had yet won the love of an honest man, and scorned it, or, if not scorning it, yet held it

in light esteem. Ah, Judith Hargrave must learn as many another woman has done, to her cost, that hearts loyal and true are not picked up in the daily march along the highway of life. In all truth, Judith had almost forgotten Frank Allington, wrapped up in this new world of her own imaginings, in this fresh life that had dawned for her, where her love of dominion and rule was gratified to the utmost, and her sense of luxury and indolence encouraged; she had almost overlooked the existence of the man to whom she was engaged, and who loved her far more than her coquettish and self-idolizing nature merited.

Some three or four days after her arrival at Leverton, she had sent him a short and somewhat unsatisfactory letter, detailing her journey and arrival, but abstaining from all mention of her handsome cousin. The thought of her lover was fresh in her mind, and she wrote far more affectionately than she would have spoken, had he been present, yet Frank's

heart hungered for more than the stilted conventional phrases contained in that sheet of pink tinted, highly scented, note paper. It was very unsatisfying, although she did say, thought poor Frank, that "she should never forget him," and signed herself "always his own."

He answered it lovingly, earnestly; he did not love his pen, but the task became an easy one when it was to Judith that he inscribed his letter, and softer feelings crept into his *fiancée's* vain heart when she read it, but only for a time—outward occurrences had such an effect upon her, and after she had folded, and laid it aside, she thought less and less of its writer, until she almost forgot him altogether. She was destined to be unpleasantly reminded of her promises, and summarily awakened from the dream into which she had fallen.

Among the letters sorted by the butler at Leverton Hall, and placed by the plates around the breakfast-table one morning, was

a large white envelope bearing her own name, and Judith, with a quick glance, that sent the blood back to her heart, snatched it up, and put it in her pocket. The action did not escape old Mr. Trevellian's quick eye.

"Tell me what your mother says, my dear," he remarked, pleasantly.

Now, as luck would have it, Judith had received a letter from her mother the evening before, and the composure that had deserted her for the moment, returned as she languidly drew from her pocket both letters, and ostentatiously tearing open the sealed envelope, dropped it on her lap, and skilfully substituted her mother's note, quietly reading aloud paragraphs from it for her uncle's benefit. So clever and adroit was she, that even the hawk-eyed old man suspected and detected nothing.

Breakfast over at length, she rushed away to her own room, and bolting the door, threw herself panting into an easy chair, to read

what her lover might have to say. Her brows contracted, and a dark flush stained her cheek, as she perused the closely written lines—

"Six weeks have you been at Leverton," said the writer, "and only once have I received a letter from you; this seems strange to me, and utterly unreconcilable with your protestations of love before we parted, and the position in which we stand to one another." Beyond this reproach there was little else of complaint in the letter; he went on to say, that through the interest of a wealthy and influential friend, he had amassed five hundred of the thousand pounds necessary to procure his partnership with Dr. Kime, and his prospects were rosy bright. By the autumn he hoped to have the remaining sum, and be duly installed as one of the firm.

"So soon," cried Judith, "and it is already the end of April!" from which remark it would seem that her lover's ecstasies found

but little echo in his *fiancée's* breast. But Judith was wily, she had no notion of dropping this lover of hers, while her chances of a fortune, or a husband, or both combined, were still so vague. Very carefully must she play her cards, lest between two stools she should come to the ground. But a few moments were sufficient to determine her in her course of action, and springing up, she drew her desk forward, and there and then commenced a letter to the young man, which should allay his anger, and reassure him of her affection, and would yet in no way interfere with her chances of success at Leverton. It was a delicate and somewhat difficult task, but Judith was not a girl to be deterred by trifles, and she very quickly concocted, what was, in her opinion, a sufficiently affectionate, and yet by no means compromising epistle.

Could Frank Allington have looked into the depths of that vain and scheming little heart, surely all the love he possessed for its

owner would have crumbled into nothingness and ashes; and bitterly though his heart might have ached the while, would he not with steady hand have ruthlessly wiped out every thing connected with the past, and commenced life anew? But could we, one and all, probe and know the inner workings of each other's breasts, though undoubtedly a vast amount of suffering and misery would thus be spared, life would become a very prosaic, and methinks, a very painful thing. Some among us would feel very humbled, I think, could we learn the secret thoughts existing in the hearts of those we fondly believe to think the most highly of us.

CHAPTER XII.

"She moulds her manners to the part she fills,
As instinct teaches, or as humour wills,
And as the grave or gay her talent calls,
Acts in the drama, till the curtain falls."

"THERE are to be private theatricals at Mrs. Sanderson's on Friday week," announced Frida Escott, with the first glimmering of enthusiasm she had shown for a long time. It was in the twilight, and although the days were growing visibly longer, they were still as Claire observed, "miserably short." She loved not the dim uncertain light that both Frida and Aunt Prue thought so charming.

"Claire knows nothing of the luxury of idleness," said Frida, and her sister retorted—

"I had rather do that, than know nothing of the luxury of usefulness."

"Oh, one cannot be expected to do two things," replied the girl, wickedly, "my forte is to be ornamental, yours, to be useful."

"Upon my word, Frida, your conceit passes all bounds," cried Claire, angrily, but Captain Escott, who happened to be present, laughed merrily; he did not think there was much fear of his pretty innocent Frida, becoming conceited, in the true and hateful sense of the word. No, Captain Escott argued, and very wisely, that to a true-hearted girl, to know herself beautiful is one thing, and to be vain of that beauty, is another, and in his heart he believed Claire to err far more in that respect, than his whole-souled little Frida.

"It's a fact, upon my word," laughed the old gentleman, "you *are* ornamental, child, there's no use in disputing it."

His little daughter coloured painfully, and beyond an expressive sort of grunt from Aunt Prue, no one made any reply. Loving her niece with all her heart, Aunt Prue could never bring herself to praise her. It was strange, that while Frida was most undoubtedly her favourite, all her expressions of love and admiration fell to the elder sister's share. Little recked Frida, content in knowing herself to be the sunshine of her father's life and home.

"Do you wish to go to the Sanderson's?" asked Claire, presently.

"Yes, of course. I *am* going," announced Winifred, decisively; "why do you ask?"

"Oh, only because you refused to go to Mrs. Wilson's, and Mrs. Rowe's, last week, so I came to the conclusion that you had given up going out—in my idea, it will look extremely rude to accept one invitation and refuse another."

"Not at all," said the girl, slowly, "it is

not necessary that you should go to every place to which you are invited."

Captain Escott looked over the top of his gold rimmed spectacles, while this discussion was going on, vaguely wondering why his little daughter should be so visibly disturbed, and why her voice should tremble as she spoke. The simple-hearted man believed it arose from sheer pleasure at the treat in store, and feeling angry that Claire should throw any obstacle in the way, he said quietly—

"Yes, Frida, child, you shall go—if Claire doesn't choose to accompany you, I will take you myself."

"I am going, thank you papa," responded Claire, while Aunt Prue looked up from her work—

"You, John! why it is twenty years and more ago since you gave up going out."

But Frida had crept to her father's side, and laid her flushed cheek against his

wrinkled one, while her heart rebuked her; for it was not for any pleasure the entertainment could afford, that made her heart beat so fast, and her pulses throb with glad anticipation, but the pretty certain knowledge that Harry Trevellian would be there, and that they twain, parted now some two months (for they had never met since that afternoon in the lanes when Harry, remembering his pledged word, had torn himself away), might stand face to face, and clasp hands, if nothing more, and her whole soul swelled within her at the thought of that contact. It was a very little thing to build her hopes upon, but trifles light as air will satisfy the hearts of the very young, and Winifred Escott was little more than child, and this unexpected opposition, and the nobleness of her lover's character, and his refusal to do anything dishonourable or clandestine, had raised him to a height in her estimation he might otherwise never have occupied. Poor little girl, she was most

bitterly disappointed when the long looked for evening at length arrived, and they edged their way among the crowd in Mrs. Sanderson's drawing rooms, to find that Harry was one of the actors. Her heart sank, she had dimly hoped that he would find a seat beside herself, and that, during the performance, they would find many an opportunity for a whispered word; but this airy fabric was dashed away, and she was but slightly consoled in remembering that she would have a chance of looking at him unobserved, and unrebuked.

The acting was very good for an amateur performance, but to Frida's dismay, Harry took the very insignificant part of a *valet-de-place*, appearing seldom, and only for a short time. He did not look among the audience at all, and the tears rose to Winifred Escott's blue eyes, as she told herself sorrowfully that he might have known *she* would be there, and have spared a smile or a glance for her. This

omission arose from no forgetfulness on Harry's part, but out of sheer bashfulness. He had never acted in his life before, and was nervously anxious lest he should forget his speech, or neglect his cue, and had no thought for anything beyond the present moment.

By and by the curtain fell, and heartily glad was one, at least, among Mrs. Sanderson's guests. It was dull, and had been somewhat protracted, and Frida had found no pleasure in it, although the voices of those around her were loud in their praises of both actors and play.

"Beautiful, wasn't it?" remarked a lady on her right, whose lean shoulders were much exposed, and whose elbows, digging into Frida, as she bent forward from time to time to get a better view of the stage, felt "like so many pins," or as Frida herself expressed it afterwards "nothing so decided as a pin—more like the nibs of a steel pen."

"Very," she responded, dryly to the lady's

query, and then she fixed her eyes upon the head-dress of a lady seated two or three rows before her, who was most wonderfully and fearfully arrayed, speculating how she contrived to keep such a towering erection on her head, and counting on her fingers how many different materials it was composed of. "Two, no three red roses, a bunch of white currants, two white ostrich—"

Frida suspended her sum in mental arithmetic, conscious that her left-hand neighbour, whom she really had scarcely noticed before, was making spasmodic efforts to attract her attention.

"I am sure I beg your pardon," she said, politely.

"I was only wemawking," said the fair-haired ensign, blushing in his eagerness to make his pretty companion enter into conversation with him, "that—aw—we shall have the tableaux presently."

"Oh, then it isn't over yet," replied poor

Frida, wistfully, but he misinterpreted her tone—

"No—aw—awfully jolly, isn't it?" hugging himself.

At any other time Frida would have derived great amusement in trotting out the little ensign, and would have made very merry afterwards to Monica, over the young man's white-fringed eyes, feeble moustache, and bored plaintive tone, which he thought it manly to assume. As it was, she merely replied courteously to his frantic efforts to get on an intimate footing.

"Been—here—long?" he asked.

"Here? where? in this room do you mean? oh, we came when the rest of the people did."

"No, now, weally—did you though? stwange I nevaw saw you."

Frida wondered if he were in possession of his proper senses, for she had been very little into society, and had seen but few of the

curious specimens to be met with there. "Hopelessly idiotic," she concluded, after a furtive survey from under her lids, "but harmless, I think."

How immensely gratified Ensign Jones would have heen, could he have known what was passing in his companion's mind, but luckily for his self-conceit he did not, and catching the amused gleam in her eyes, he flattered himself that he was making a great impression, and went on rapturously—

"I think I've met you before, Miss—aw—"

"Miss—Escott," supplemented Frida.

"Miss Escott—aw—haven't I?"

She shook her head, "No, I don't remember—I do not go out a great deal."

"No?—aw—awful pity that—enjoy life while you're young, you know, before you come to the sear and yellow leaf business—aw—as some fellow says. Can't think how those sort of things come into one's bwains—instinct—aw—don't you think so?

nevew had it myself—couldn't say a clevaw thing to save my life—you wouldn't believe it, I daresay—aw—fact though, 'pon my honour! Fellow at the Club—what's his name? never *can* wemember fellow's names—short name, like Smith—aw—or—"

"Blennerhasset," suggested the girl, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes.

"No, Curgenvon, that's it—thought it was short name somehow—clever chap, but awful boy at telling *stowies*, and he was dwawing on his imagination a twifle, and I just looked at him—and he turned wound saying, 'Don't look at me in that tone of voice, Jones,' did upon my honour—course all the fellows laughed—aw—fellow must be awfully clevaw to say those sort of things often—aw—don't you think so, Miss—aw—Escott. Now you wouldn't think it, but positively—aw—" lowering his tone confidentially, but at this moment the curtain rose, and the stilted speech, and hesitating manner, which were be-

coming a trifle monotonous to his auditor, were, perforce, hushed.

The first of the tableaux was a very pretty scene. Fair Rosamond in her bower, Queen Eleanor standing by, stern and implacable, dagger in hand, offering the bowl of poison. Rosamond's fair hair swept the ground, as she half knelt, with supplicating gesture, and raised, clasped hands.

The parts had been well allotted, and it was undoubtedly a success. Frida soon found that the dark haired girl who personated Queen Eleanor appeared in most of the scenes; she was a good actress, and Frida was curiously attracted to her.

"Now we are going to have Sir Walter Waleigh, spweading the cloak for Queen Elizabeth," lisped the irrepressible ensign. The curtain slowly rose, and with parted lips, Frida gazed, the colour flaming over her fair face, as in Sir Walter Raleigh, in courtly costume, in the act of spreading his cloak for his

Queen to walk upon, she recognized Harry Trevellian. Who was that bold-eyed girl who, with studded stomacher, and crisp white ruff, stood proudly, with one foot upon her courtier's cloak, and eyes rivetted haughtily, but to Frida's gaze it seemed tenderly and indulgently on *her* lover? Who was she?

"Did you see that?" broke in her companion, again, "fine acting isn't it? she's a stunning girl."

"Who is she?" asked Winifred, vainly endeavouring to steady her voice, and speak unconcernedly.

"Squire Twevellian's niece and heiress, I believe; going to mawwy that young fellow, they say—don't know if it's twue—shouldn't wonder—aw—."

The girl beside him gazed blankly out, over the surging sea of heads before her, seeing and hearing nothing. Then that was Judith Hargrave, and rumour had already had it that Harry was to marry her. Conscious

of a numbing pain at her heart, she feared to speak, and sat stonily still.

The curtain rose on the last of the tableaux vivants.

"The Black Bwunsicker," prompted her neighbour.

A murmur of admiration rose all around, as Judith Hargrave stood motionless, arrested in the act of binding the scarf on her lover's arm—her face upturned to his, and as in the features of the man looking down on her, Frida Escott detected the glance of love and admiration, she could not guess was feigned, the look that had once been bent on *her*, a stifled cry escaped her lips, and she rose from her seat, as if to escape. But the blank stare on the face of her neighbour recalled her to herself, and she sank back again saying—"I —I cannot bear it, it is the heat."

Aunt Prue was by her side in a moment, genuinely alarmed, for in all her life she had never known her ill before, and Frida gladly

acquiesced in her decision that she should go home; so the carriage was summoned at once.

Oh! it seemed to the poor child as though they would never let her alone, never cease pestering her with questions. Aunt Prue's well-meant solicitude—the smelling bottle, burnt feathers, the endless paraphernalia she deemed necessary in such a case, almost drove her mad.

At length she was free of them all, and in her own little bed lay and sobbed herself to sleep. And Claire never told how Harry Trevellian had sought her side and asked where her sister was, and how she had answered coldly, that "Frida had been there but was tired and had gone home." She felt heartily ashamed that her sister should have made such a scene, and was loth to speak of it more than was absolutely necessary.

Harry's heart sank terribly. "Gone home, —so early?" he answered incredulously, for he had been looking forward to the end of

those stupid exhibitions, when he might speak a few words to his little lady-love without transgressing, and he was most bitterly disappointed. Not even Frida herself had looked forward to that evening's entertainment more joyously than he had done, and he could scarcely credit Claire's words. He turned away, muttering something that was the reverse of a blessing upon his ill-luck.

Had Frida known that he had asked after her, it would have been some little comfort, but Claire remained silent, and Frida's trembling lips could not put the question point-blank to her.

It was very hard, for, "oh I don't know when I shall see him again," sobbed the poor child, "and, perhaps, after all, he will be obliged to marry his cousin."

Harry had no notion of doing any such thing, he had been inveigled into taking part in the theatricals at Mrs. Sanderson's sorely against his will. Indeed he had absolutely

refused at first, and much angered his cousin by so doing, and she had appealed to her uncle, declaring that Jessie Sanderson had told her how short they were of gentlemen, and that she, never supposing Harry could have any objection, had promised that he should help them.

It was in vain that the young man pleaded that he had not a notion how to act, that he would be shy and nervous, and probably spoil it all. "You can learn," she had retorted, for she was piqued at his refusal, and resolved to have her own way, and poor Harry, hating it sorely, was forced to succumb, but never dreamed that Frida, looking on, could have found aught to grieve and vex her in what was every whit as distasteful to him. He had had many annoying and disagreeable things to do of late, and he counted this among them, little guessing how pronounced a proceeding it was, and what a fearful importance it had assumed in the uninitiated eyes of the girl who loved him.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A maiden, whose lips had been loosed by the past,
The past which the pain of the present redeems,
Broke forth into song as she bound the ripe ears,
Broke forth into song that was mingled with tears,
Yet breathed of a hope in the birth of the years."

HAROLD THORNTON.

"FANNY, where are you?" Judith Hargrave called angrily from the little sitting room, which her uncle allowed her to call her own, to the maid who was in the bedroom beyond.

"Here, Miss, coming," and Fanny promoted from under-housemaid, to the post of lady's-maid, made her appearance.

She was a pretty, rosy cheeked girl, somewhat frivolous, perhaps, but very warm-hearted; and she stood demurely, while Miss Hargrave continued—

"Now, Fanny, put your bonnet on, and take this pattern of silk to 'Floss and Guipures', and see if they can match the shade exactly, in wild-roses; now, be very particular."

"Yes, Miss, I will," responded the girl cheerfully. There was a grand ball in prospect, which Judith had set her heart on attending. It was some few miles distant, but as she had insisted that her cousin should accompany her, the young lady did not make much trouble of the distance, indeed to be subjected to an hour or more's *tête-à-tête*, shut up in Mr. Trevellian's comfortable carriage, would be no such great trial, and Judith saucily shook her head, when her uncle suggested that it was not quite the right thing to go without a chaperon.

"Nonsense, uncle," she replied briskly. "I am perfectly well able to take care of myself, and Harry is going with me, a host in himself."

The squire did not trouble himself much about the *covenances* of society, but it struck even his obtuse mind that it was a bold proceeding to go alone with his son to a public ball, still it might suit his purpose after all, for people would naturally conclude that they were engaged. One thing was certain, there was no one he could ask to take her. There were very few families in Leverton whom old Mr. Trevellian considered on a par with himself, and there was not one among them who would not have demurred at taking charge of the headstrong young lady. He did not care to bid her stay at home, for when deprived of any whim or caprice, she was apt to revenge herself on those around her. Miss Hargrave, in her injured moods, was not nearly so pleasant a companion as Judith unchecked in the course she chose to take. Besides, some fortnight ago, she had wheedled her uncle into giving her a ten pound note to buy a new dress, and she had been par-

ticularly charming and agreeable afterwards, attending to his every wish, and sitting a whole evening before the chess-board, the old man's favourite pastime; and a few days later, she announced that the dress she had bought with his present was for this very ball, and after having admired the somewhat loud costume of pink, lavishly trimmed with silver, Mr. Trevellian felt that he could scarcely put his veto on her appearing there in it.

Judith was managing her game with consummate tact; she had already accomplished the first step towards remaining at the Hall, namely, to render herself necessary to its owner. This she did in a hundred different ways. Some trouble in the household affairs would arise, perhaps, through her own fault entirely, and the matter would come to the squire's knowledge; he would fret and fume, working himself into a rage, and she would lay her cool hand on his, saying quietly—

"Leave it to me, Uncle Ben, I will settle it; it is too bad that you should be annoyed."

And in the peace and quietness that ensued, the old man could not fail to recognise his niece's influence, and bless the day that brought her under his roof. Little by little, step by step, did she contrive to make herself indispensable in the household, and verily she deserved no little praise for the firm hand with which she suppressed the waste and extravagance that had hitherto been unchecked, and the good sense and untiring discipline by which she managed to convert the thriftless *menage* into a comfortable, cosy home.

With a light step, in her simple brown merino dress, and little close-fitting cottage bonnet, Fanny Mason sped on her way, to fulfil her mistress's errand.

The town lay some miles beyond the Hall, and to reach it Fanny had to pass close by Fairholm, the residence of Captain Escott. Previous to Fanny's engagement as house-

maid at the Hall, she had lived with Mrs. Hazletine as her own personal attendant, and Monica was sorry to part with the girl, for she was quick-handed, and always obliging, but after the birth of her child, she felt she would rather have a middle aged woman to wait on herself, who understood something of the management of a nursery as well, and could give an eye to the nursemaid, who was only a young girl. It was but a little that Monica exacted of her lady's maid, for she had been accustomed to do everything for herself, while under her guardian's roof, and to have any one constantly about her was irksome; and beyond the keeping of her wardrobe in repair, and occasionally dressing her beautiful hair, there was little or nothing to do; and thus Fanny was dismissed, and it was with a very heavy heart that she left her service. There was a gentle charm about Monica, that won the hearts of all her servants, and when Judith Hargrave found, upon questioning her, that she understood the duties of a lady's maid,

and determined to let her wait entirely upon herself, the girl felt infinitely more at home. But there are mistresses, and mistresses; and Fanny soon found that it was a very difficult task to please Miss Hargrave. Her position was no sinecure. Here, there and everywhere was she expected to be, and if she did not come at the first call of her unreasonable young mistress, she was sharply scolded. Yet Judith would have been very sorry to part with her, for Fanny showed an aptitude for her duties that delighted her, and she indulged her idle propensities to their full extent, allowing Fanny to wait on her hand and foot. The hideous structure that Judith herself had been wont to pile up on the top of her shapely head, had given place, under Fanny's nimble fingers, to smooth coils, and rich braids, and a soft fringe of hair now overhung the somewhat heavy brow. A vast improvement truly, and one to which the young lady herself was keenly alive.

On the afternoon in question, Fanny had

some little difficulty in fulfilling her commission. The exact shade of silk was not forthcoming in wild roses, and Fanny had made a *détour* of the town, before she found what she thought likely to suit her young lady. She knew that Miss Hargrave required these flowers for the bodice of her new pink dress, which she intended to wear at the ball that evening, and she did not dare to return without them. It was growing dusk, as she at length wended her way homeward, expecting a rebuke for her protracted errand, when, as she neared the Fairholm gates, some one crouching among the shrubs and bushes sprang up and confronted her. Fanny screamed, but the next moment laughed at her own folly, as she recognised Frida Escott.

The young lady had always been a great favourite with her, and while in Mrs. Hazletine's service, she had seen a great deal of her.

"Oh, Fanny, how long you have been," she said, "I have been watching for such a

long time, I saw you go past nearly two hours ago."

Fanny rapidly explained her detention.

Frida's face flushed nervously, "Are you Miss Hargrave's lady's maid then? and do you like her? is she a nice girl, Fanny?"

Fanny hesitated. "Well, Miss Winifred, as young ladies go, I daresay she is, but I begin to think Mrs. Hazletine spoiled me by her kindness and consideration, for I don't seem as if I could take to any one else."

So Miss Hargrave was no favourite with her lady's maid! This Frida saw at once, and it emboldened her to put her next query.

"They say she is going to marry Mr. Trevellian's son!"

"Do they?" cried Fanny, in some surprise. "We haven't heard of it in the servants' hall —still, I shouldn't a bit wonder," meditatively. "They are most always together."

A sickening pang contracted Frida's heart, and she leaned heavily against the gate-post.

Fanny was about to bid her adieu, and hasten on, when she detained her hesitatingly—

"Fanny, I know you would do me a service if you could," she said, striving to clear her young voice of its tremble. "I want you to give this note into Mr. Harry's own hands, and—and—not let any one else know." Burning blushes chased over the fair face. For a moment Fanny was puzzled. At the time she lived at the "Grange," there was little or no acquaintance between the Escotts and the family at the Hall, and she knew very well that during the two years and a half that she had been there, none of the ladies from either "The Grange," or "Fairholm," had visited Squire Trevellian, but Frida's face was a revelation in itself, and she was a kind-hearted girl, so she took the letter, and slipped it into her pocket, saying, "Oh, yes, Miss Winifred, there won't be no difficulty about that."

"Thank you, Fanny." Poor Frida's voice

was almost inaudible. Bitterly ashamed was she of this clandestine step, and yet it seemed the only chance of communicating with her lover. Since that miserable evening at Mrs. Sanderson's, she had been sick both in mind and body—she was only a fragile little creature, and the excitement had been too much for her. She pined with a strange persistency to see Harry, if but for a few short moments. Night and day she dwelt upon it, persuading herself with childish impotence that she should die if she did not see him. Standing at the dining room window that afternoon, she had seen Fanny Mason pass, and had rapidly made up her mind that she would trust to the girl's good nature to befriend her. She had thought many times of writing to him, but the chances that her letter might fall into the squire's hands were too great to be risked, and she felt drearily, that to trust to chance to bring about an interview was worse than useless.

The wrong she was doing, in striving to make her lover break his promise, did occur to her after her letter had left her own possession; but she quickly stifled the voice of conscience. "I never gave *my* word that I would not meet him again," she thought. Once, she did catch a glimpse of two figures on horse-back, a lady and gentleman, but she could not be certain that it was Harry, nor yet that the lady was the heroine of Mrs. Sanderson's "Tableaux Vivants;" but in her heart she believed it was, and had returned home more dreary and forlorn than ever, incurring Claire's reproof for idleness, when she stated that she had felt too tired to go as far as the circulating library, which she had promised to do.

After Fanny had departed with swift step, to make up for loss of time, she slips into the house unobserved, and as she remembers that in a few short hours he will have her letter, she feels almost calm and happy.

Her face brightened already, even at the remote prospect of seeing him soon, she takes her place at the tea table, and by and by she actually laughs aloud at some quaint speech of the captain's; but her father looks up with sudden tear dimmed eyes, noting for the first time how pale and wan she looks, and the echo of that joyless laugh stirs his heart strangely, and he remembers with a curious ache how, a few weeks ago, she had been the merriest little cricket that ever gladdened a man's fireside; and realizes that his radiant little sunbeam is gone. His eyes linger fondly on her face. Oh, if he could but give back to her the lost happiness for which she yearns; if he could but cull the thorns from her path—his darling, his best-loved child. He had not thought that she would feel this separation so keenly, and the knowledge of her grief and loneliness cuts him to the quick.

Lost happiness! does it ever come back

again? The old faith once crushed; the old friendship once laid aside; the old love once slighted; can they ever be renewed? I doubt it. Are they not plants of so tender, so fragile a nature, that they can bloom but once in this world; but pérhaps—God knows—they may blossom again in eternity; but on this earth, never more, never more.

To some sooner, to others later, comes the sad knowledge that this life is all unsatisfying. That joys sought eagerly will ever elude our grasp,—anticipation exceed reality,—the happiness we press to, prove a mirage in the desert,—the love we frantically crave, crumble into dust and ashes. And, is it not well? Were this world all youth paints it, and womanhood learns it can never be, should we not be too well content here, too loth to leave it? Perhaps, the joys that elude us, the love that escapes us, the troubles that cloud us, are links in the golden chain that draws us heavenwards.

CHAPTER XIV.

"But neither heat nor frost nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been."

It was the evening of the famous ball on which Judith Hargrave had so set her heart, and Fanny Mason, engaged on her young lady's toilette, had completely forgotten the missive entrusted to her care. Miss Hargrave took a final survey of her figure in the pier-glass at length. Throwing her cloak aside at the last moment, with an impatient exclamation that Fanny had placed the silver butterfly in her dark hair too low, and although her maid assured her that it looked far better there, than perched on the summit

of a thick plait, she insisted upon having it altered, and Fanny had no choice but to obey, and then with a complacent smile the young lady sailed down stairs, resplendent in her gorgeous pink silk.

Fanny was tired, and she sat down for a moment beside the dressing table, opposite the mirror, which had a few moments before reflected her mistress's grandeur, and surveyed the flushed, tired features it now presented. The room was in terrible disorder, and the girl sighed, as she remembered that every thing must be put straight, unless she wished to draw down a scolding on her head. As she drew her handkerchief from her pocket, to pass it over the heated brow, the recollection of Miss Escott's letter flashed across her mind.

"There now—to think I should forget! And may be I won't have a chance to see Mr. Harry in the morning."

Downstairs sped Fanny, oblivious of her

fatigue, in the hope that she might find her master alone. But as she hesitated at the library door, it suddenly burst open, and Miss Hargrave appeared on the threshold.

"Fanny," she cried, impetuously, "come upstairs with me at once; I have lost the crescent of rubies from my locket. I know it was all right when I wore it last; it must have caught in something, but I cannot rest without finding it! Harry," with a backward movement of her head, "you won't mind waiting—will you? We have plenty of time."

Fanny was obliged to follow her, but as her eyes fell on a knot of servants watching near the baize door leading to the servants' hall for a glimpse of the young lady's finery, a sudden happy thought struck her, and she slipped the note into the hand of Jessy, the housemaid, with an emphatic whisper, "Take it at once—he is in the library."

Now Jessy was a clever, shrewd girl, and

what could have possessed her to suppose that the note Fanny had conveyed so mysteriously was for the squire, and not, as *we* know it was, intended for his son, I can't say, unless the envelope, which was merely addressed to "Mr. Trevellian," should have misled her; but certain it was that she immediately tapped at the library door, and looking in perceived the old man sitting in his accustomed place by the fire side. Jessy was somewhat of a favourite with the squire, who was apt to be rough and harsh with his servants; but the girl had a bright smile, and a ready hand, which went a long way towards mollifying the cross-grained old man. He looked up as she came across the floor, but before he could ask what she wanted, she had given him the note, saying—

"Please, sir, Fanny asked me to give you this at once."

"Eh—eh—what?—give me this!—Fanny —why—" but Jessy had retreated. When

Judith Hargrave came into the room, ten minutes later, saying, joyfully,—

"I have found it, it was in my dressing-case, and must have—" She paused, adding, "Why, Uncle Ben, what *is* the matter?"

The old man's face was black as night and his eyes were fixed on the paper he held in his shaking hand.

"What is it?" she asked again, coming close to his side; and for answer he broke into a low chuckle.

"Ah, ah!—caught in the trap this time, my young lady. Ha, ha, ha!—so you want to meet my son, do you? Ha, ha, ha! Here, Judith, read it," thrusting it into her hands; "it was meant for Harry, you see," noting the look of utter bewilderment on her face.

"DEAR HARRY,—

"Meet me without fail to-morrow in the same place where we met long ago—under the elm tree. I know you will not disappoint me, when I tell you I *must* see

you. If you are not there to-morrow, I shall go again every afternoon this week at three o'clock.

"FRIDA."

"Frida!—who is she, uncle?" a suspicion dawning on her for the first time of a rival in the field. She had felt herself so sure of her cousin's heart, but she was destined now to be undeceived.

In a choking voice, interlarded with many "ha, ha's" and "eh, eh's," the squire poured into the ears of the mortified girl the recital of his son's ill-fated love-story.

Judith stood erect, her eyes blazing with the wrath—she yet was quick-witted enough to conceal—and then she suddenly sank down by the squire's arm chair, forgetful of the finery she crushed in the process; and putting her mouth to the wrinkled ear, she whispered, clearly and slowly—

"We will frustrate this little scheme, Uncle Ben—you and I together—shall we?"

He nodded gleefully several times, and suddenly bending forward, she tossed the unfortunate note into the midst of the burning coals, and uncle and niece watched it shrivel into nothingness; then Judith rose from her knees, and dropped a kiss lightly on the old man's forehead—a seal to their unholy compact.

Another instant and Harry entered, apologising for his absence, saying that he had been giving orders that "Hero," the mastiff, should be chained up, lest he should follow the carriage, as he was in the habit of doing. "It is a bad trick I cannot break him of," laughed the young fellow, all unconscious of the fact that a cruel old man and a vain, ambitious girl had just joined hands to wreck his happiness, and that he could stand but a slight chance against so unscrupulous a woman as his cousin Judith might become, were it necessary to attain her ends and seize the coveted prize.

Judith Hargrave was well-nigh maddened by the knowledge that had so unexpectedly come upon her, and she set her white teeth firmly together, as she told herself bitterly that while she thought she had made so easy a conquest, in reality her cousin cared little more for her than he did for her lady's maid. She had felt herself so secure, had hugged herself in the belief that his heart was all her own—and yet she had been less than nothing to him.

A very dangerous enemy was Squire Trevellian's niece likely to become, with that bright, relentless glitter in her eyes, and the implacable resentment in her heart, and steadfast resolve to step between Frida Escott and her lover.

There is no power on earth so cruel as that attained by slighted love—no hand so unerring in its aim, as that which is directed by a jealous and scorned woman!

It was not until quite late that night that

Fanny questioned Jessy. She had to sit up for Miss Hargrave, and knowing that her young lady could not be home before three or four o'clock in the morning, had borrowed a book to while away the hours; and when Jessy came in to light the lamp and make up the fire, she said—

"You gave that note into Mr. Harry's own hand, as I told you?"

"Mr. Harry!" cried the startled girl. "Why, no, Fanny; it was directed to Mr. Trevellian, and I gave it to the old squire."

"You—what? Jessy—what do you mean?" Fanny's face grew white.

"Gracious me!" responded Jessy, "what have I done now? I tell you, it was directed as plain as ever I see anything in my life, and that's all the thanks I get! If it were anything pertikler, you should have done it yourself," and Jessy, seeing at a glance what a mistake she had made, covered her confusion by a hasty exit.

Fanny sat perfectly still, horrified at what might be the consequence of Jessy's stupidity, and blaming herself for trusting the note to anybody.

"But who would have supposed that she *could* make such a stupid blunder," thought the poor girl; "and what will Miss Frida say? It may be ever so long before I see her again."

Fanny was quite right; it was a very long time before she was free to leave the hall. Miss Hargrave took very good care that her maid should have enough to do to keep her indoors, and that she should have no chance whatever of answering any question that Miss Frida might put to her as to the fate of her entrusted note.

CHAPTER XV.

"My heart I bid thee answer,
How are Love's marvels wrought?
Two hearts to one pulse beating,
Two spirits with one thought.
And tell me how love cometh!
'Tis here, unsought—unsent,
And tell me how love goeth?
That was not *Love* which *went*."

FROM THE GERMAN.

IT is the last day of Mr. Roebuck's engagement at the Queen's Theatre, Doncaster. And it is Nesta Mordaunt's benefit night.

The town is ringing with her praises, for the people in the provinces are not so fastidious as the London critics, and are not afraid to express an unqualified opinion, that Miss Mordaunt is a charming actress. Nugent Monroe's prediction that she would become

a star, is fast becoming realised, but it is owing as much to her gentle, winning smile, graceful carriage, and singularly sweet voice, as to any dramatic talent that she possesses. She is changed since we saw her last. Dark lines encircle her eyes, and the expression of her mouth is more sad than ever, and when her voice breaks the stillness, the listener looks up with a vague pity, for tears tremble through its liquid sweetness. Perhaps it is the continued strain on her nervous system that is beginning to tell on her, the hot air she breathes for so many hours out of the twenty-four, the excitement, the constant need for fictitious smiles, that banishes them so effectually when she is alone. Perhaps!

The maid has just brought in a tray, with Mrs. Mordaunt's afternoon tea, a luxury she fully believes she could not exist without, and as she drops the third lump of sugar in her cup, she glances across to where her daughter sits by the open escritoire with papers

and boxes, and string, before her, and her pen poised uncertainly in her fingers, and says—"Nesta, are you not going to have some tea?"

Her voice breaks harshly on the girl's thoughts, and she turns impatiently, with a negative on her lips, but before she can speak, the lady says again, "What *are* you doing, child?" rising hurriedly from her seat, "where did you get that bracelet?" An exclamation of annoyance parts her daughter's lips, as she replies, "Mother I did not want you to see it. These sort of things are unpleasant enough, without being subjected to questionings."

"Well, I'm sure I don't see anything unpleasant in receiving a bracelet like this," drawing it from its bed of soft cotton wool, and gazing at it admiringly. It was a plain gold band, very handsome and substantial, and in the centre was a monogram, 'N. M.' exquisitely wrought in precious gems.

"It is beautiful," said Mrs. Mordaunt, holding it up to the light.

Nesta drew a sheet of paper to her, and commenced writing, making no sign that she heard her mother's remark, save a heightened colour, and a trembling hand.

"You are a lucky girl," continued the lady after a pause, "do you know who it came from, or was it sent anonymously?"

"Hush!" cried her daughter suddenly—"don't mother! it is the first time in my life that I have been insulted," then, exasperated by the lady's calm smiling face, she drew forth a letter, crumpled and torn, as if in anger. "There, read that! I wished to hide it from you, but you have found out so much, that you had better know all."

Her mother deliberately crossed the room to find her spectacles, and after reading the few lines contained in the letter, she said, "Really, Nesta, I don't know what you mean. This appears to me to be a very kind, nice letter—very!"

"Oh, mamma!" hot blushes burned on Nesta's face, "you cannot understand what it says."

"Yes, I do!" said the lady stubbornly, "this gentleman, who ever he is, asks your acceptance of the accompanying gift, and signs himself 'Your ardent admirer.' There is nothing strange in that! It is a little tribute to your charms, my dear, and shows how much the people here think of you. I only wish your poor papa could have lived to see this day, he would have been so proud of you."

"My father," said the girl. "Ah! had he lived, he would at least have protected his daughter from insults."

"There you are again," peevishly. "I wonder at you, that I do. I never knew such an odd child. Most girls would be delighted with such a magnificent present."

"And would grant the donor's request that he may call and see me? Then I am glad I

am not of the school that '*most girls*' belong to. Mother, can't you see, that it is an insult? Were I anything but an actress, do you suppose that any man would dare to send me a present, petitioning at the same time for an interview? Gentlemen do not presume in this way towards ladies, but I suppose that the world concludes that my profession exempts me from the title of 'lady.' Give me the bracelet, mother, I must send it back at once."

"Send it back, Nesta?"

"Yes, mamma, send it back at once. You may read the note that will accompany it.

"Miss Mordaunt presents her compliments to 'L. F. G.' and begs to say that she must decline to receive presents sent anonymously, or to grant an interview to a gentleman with whom she is unacquainted."

"Gentleman!" curling her lip scornfully, "had he been a gentleman he would not have dared address me in such a familiar way, but

he shall learn that Nesta Mordaunt, the *actress*, is quite as exclusive and unapproachable, as the young lady in her teens, whose mother carefully guards her from scrutinizing eyes, so long as she is not '*out*,' and far more so, than that same young lady who, when the right time comes, will take her place unblushingly, by her rival sisters,—'*on view*,' —('*for sale*' I had almost said) in the public mart of the fashionable London drawing rooms; and no introduction is as great a bar to an acquaintance with *me*, as it would prove to the most scrupulous of elegantly habiliated, powdered, and painted demoiselles. Pshaw! it is not worth being angry about, only——." Nesta drew her breath hard.

"Well, my dear, I suppose you know what you are talking about, but I *don't*, I candidly confess, and if you think you have been insulted, I must say I cannot see where, or how."

"Poor mamma," said her daughter, softly, as

Mrs. Mordaunt left the room, "it is strange how unsophisticated she is! I, at my age, know more of the evils of the world than she does. Perhaps it is best, for she is thus saved a great deal of humiliation and shame. I wonder if I had lived all my life in a little country place, as she did, seeing no one more inocuous than the doctor and parson, whether I should have been any happier? No, I don't think so, for care creeps in, let you live how or where you may, and I know poor mamma was often very miserable. How could she help it, when her husband was away on foreign service. I have heard her say, how she begged him to take her with him, but it was just before the birth of her second child, and her health was so delicate, that it was out of the question. And—" with a shudder, "he never came back to her, and my poor little brother was born into the world, after his father's death, and struggled through two or three short weeks of feebleness and

suffering, and then he died too. But why do I recall this? does not the present hold sorrow enough of its own, that I must needs glance backward on the past?" wiping the tears from her eyes.

She had concluded and directed the letter to the initials and address given, and had laid it beside the carefully sealed packet, leaning back wearily, when the door opened, and a smiling face looked in, and a merry voice said,

"Eh, Miss Mordaunt—all alone? and in the dumps, I declare! It's very evident, you want me to cheer you up." Nesta laughed, and Cecil Munroe, a privileged favourite, flung himself on a footstool at her feet.

"What's up?" he asked elegantly.

"Nothing," she replied, "that is to say, nothing that would interest you."

"Oh, I say, don't"—his jolly face growing grave—"you know I like to hear everything about you. I'll be your father confessor—on you go!"

Then, seeing that the grave look gave no signs of relenting, he added—

"It's not about Nugent, is it?"

"No!" very quick and emphatic was the reply, "why should you think of him, Cecil?"

The boy looked up keenly, "Oh, I know a thing or two, I'm not so green as they think me! I know Nugent has your photo, because I saw it in his dressing-case once, when he gave me his keys to look for something or other, and"—glancing expressively at the hoop set with corals, that she wore, "that ring looks uncommonly like one he used to have, and you wear it on *that* finger too; it looks rather suspicious, you see! I say, you aren't angry with me, are you? I didn't mean to be impertinent," earnestly, "only I know there's a deal more going on than you tell me," pausing for a reply.

None came. And when he looked up, her face was hidden in her hands, and the big

drops plashed through the thin fingers. The boy was distressed.

"What a blundering ass I am," he said reproachfully, "to make you cry. Miss Mordaunt, won't you stop?"

She raised her face, a sunshiny smile beaming through the rain.

"Cecil, I am engaged to your brother," she said, with gentle dignity; "but he wished me to keep it secret, and I have respected his wish. You have found it out for yourself, may I trust you not to mention it to any one, until Nugent tells you of it himself, as he will some day, I suppose?" with a sigh.

"Yes, I promise. Why, you'll be my sister, won't you?" with a glad look on his young face. "Nugent is a sly fellow! I told him I had got to know you; I didn't say much about Kate Little, you know, I only said you had got me out of a scrape, and been no end good to me, and he was just as cool as a cucumber. It wasn't until long afterwards,

that I began to see which way the wind blew. I wonder when you'll be married, and where you'll live. So the madre doesn't know, or any of them! jolly, ain't it? I am glad, though, and no mistake. You'll be the right sort of sister for a fellow to have, a heap better than Minnie. She's awfully pert to me sometimes, and she's quite two years younger; great cheek you know, but a boy can't bully his sister, can he? so I have to stand it. I only wish she was a boy sometimes, wouldn't I punch her head! Have you ever seen her, Miss Mordaunt? she has fair hair all *tousled* all over her forehead, she scrunches it, or, I don't know what they call it, with the tongs, and you can always tell when Minnie's going to bed, by the awful smell of burnt hair all over the place. One night, there was a frightful yelling upstairs, just as if somebody were being murdered, and, I didn't exactly go up to see what it was, for we had been having some

chaps to dinner, and they'd been smoking, and telling a lot of yarns about robbers and Fenians, and I wasn't as brave then as I am now," pompously; "I was a good bit younger, so I cuddled up under the clothes, and the first thing I knew, I was asleep; but next morning it all came out; half of Minnie's locks had taken their departure, and there was only a little frizz left. She had made the tongs too hot, and burnt them off. Wasn't she in a way, that's all? I tried to comfort the poor bereaved thing, and told her she wasn't half a bad looking girl, now that I could see what her face was really like; how could a fellow judge, you know, with such a limited view? It gave her rather a landscapy sort of appearance, though, which she couldn't make up her mind to admire. It has been no end of a joke against her ever since, poor Minnie's *stubble.*"

"I expect you are an awful tease," said Nesta, "I shall be half afraid of such an incorrigible brother-in-law."

"Oh, you needn't be a bit afraid," he returned, confidentially; "I'm rather a pleasant sort of boy, if you don't rub up my fur the wrong way, which Minnie always manages to do somehow. Still sisters are awfully nice, aren't they? other people's sisters, you know," in a reflective tone. "There's a chap at our school, Miss Mordaunt—(I should think you might let me call you 'Nesta,' now)—his name is Flowers, and he's an out and out good sort of fellow, he makes you laugh all the time. And yesterday, when Roberts—(he's an awful bully, you know)—thrashed a youngster for not copying out some verses for him, I told Flowers my fingers itched to get at Roberts, and pay him out for his meanness. Roland Butler, such a fop! Oh, Miss Mordaunt, if you could only see him, with his eye-glass in his eye, and his hat stuck at the side of his head, winking at the servant girls! he thinks himself quite irresistible, but he isn't, a bit, you know. Well,

he was looking on, and sucking the top of his cane, and he drawls out, 'It's enough to make a man strike his own grandmother, isn't it, Flowers?' Bob turns round and says, 'haven't got any, and if I had I shouldn't like to *go back on my ancestors*.' Pretty sharp, wasn't it? he hates Butler, like all that—all the chaps do—Once—"

"Oh, Cecil, do stop," said Nesta laughing, "and I shall have to send you away now, for I have several things to do, before I go to the theatre to-night."

"What a bore," said the boy, rising, and stretching himself lazily, "how I wish you were not going to leave Doncaster."

"Do you, Cecil?" tenderly, "I am not altogether sorry."

"But when on earth shall I see you again?"

She smiled sadly. "I don't know, indeed."

"I wish Nugent would be quick, and

marry you," he cried impulsively, "I shall ask him why he doesn't."

"Cecil, have you forgotten your promise?"

"Oh, no, of course not—but—it's too bad that I mayn't speak to Nugent about it! I say, Miss Mordaunt, couldn't you give him a hint now about it?"

"What, about hastening our marriage?"

"No, but about my having found it out! I don't think he'd be much surprised; he knows I am a cute sort of a boy; he's awfully careful not to let me hear anything about himself ever, for he knows what a chap I am to let it out."

"That is a recommendation, certainly, and a great inducement to make me tell him, isn't it?" archly.

"Oh, but I wouldn't let *this* out, you see if I do. And if I have to say 'Miss Mordaunt' now, I shan't when you are my sister."

"No," she replied merrily, "because, when

that time arrives, if ever it does, I shall have ceased to be Miss Mordaunt."

"Bother!" he said laughing, "well, any way, I shall always think of you as 'Nesta' now, mayn't I?"

"Foolish boy!" she nodded amusedly. And with a promise to come very early in the morning to see her, before she left Doncaster, he at length took his leave, and she heard him whistling as he went down stairs, light-hearted boy that he was.

Nesta's acquaintance with Nugent's brother had come about in a strange way. Truly, this world is a very small one, when those you least expect to see, run across you, in some remote corner, every day of the week, and schoolmates, and friends, parted for years, meet at the extremities of the earth.

Among the actresses was a clever, bold girl, named Kate Little. A girl whom Nesta instinctively avoided, but who had a curious fancy for herself. She was reckless, and

frivolous, wrapped up in admiration of her own somewhat showy person, but not really bad, and after a while, Nesta tacitly tolerated her. She was not a girl she could ever have liked, or really cared for; but she was sorry for her, for Kate had neither father nor mother, and while thrown on the world to earn her own livelihood, was left to her own devices, and Nesta, inwardly marvelled that the girl should keep so straight a path as she did, knowing her heedless ways, and ingrained love of flattery and admiration.

One day, soon after they came to Doncaster, Kate showed her the photograph of a lad, bright-faced and blue-eyed, saying a young fellow in the town had given it in exchange for one of her own.

What was it, Nesta wondered, that took her fancy so strangely, and rivetted her attention. Where had she seen the face before or—what was it? a trick of the

laughing mouth, or the lazy gleam in the saucy eyes, that seemed so familiar to her?

"I have it," she said, half aloud, and with a quick movement she turned to the girl—

"Who is he, did you say?"

"Well, I didn't tell you his name, but I don't mind your knowing, Miss Mordaunt; it is Cecil Monroe, and he is at college here. An awfully nice fellow, up to fun, too. Look what he brought me yesterday!" exhibiting a small Mosaic cross.

"If he is only a schoolboy, I shouldn't think he had much money to spend on trinkets, Kate," she said. "I would have more pride, if I were you, than to rob a lad of his pocket-money."

"Oh, Miss Mordaunt, he gave me it in such a nice way, I didn't like to refuse it; and it is not of much value," turning it over in her hand, with a half-repentant expression on her bonny face.

Some few days after this, Kate told with

great glee, how Cecil had been at the theatre the night before, and only just escaped being found out by Dr. Curlew.

"Oh, Katie, you are older than he is, you ought not to try and get him into disgrace," said Nesta, reprovingly, a tender feeling stirring at her heart for Nugent's brother.

"Pshaw! he's able to take care of himself," rejoined the girl, pertly, "he's to be there to-morrow night, because he wants to see me in 'High Life below Stairs.'"

With a quick resolve, Nesta spoke—

"I should like to know him, Kate, you can bring him, and introduce him to me."

Kate looked amazed; she knew Miss Mordaunt's rule to know no one, not even the members of her own profession, and she wondered not a little at first, but "I suppose it's just because he's a hobble-de-hoy," she said to herself, "if he had been a handsome young man, she would have been a deal more squeamish; but in that case, maybe he

wouldn't have cared for *me*," sighing; "I know if I were in Miss Mordaunt's place, I would enjoy myself; you wouldn't catch me shutting my doors, and giving myself such airs, as if the men would poison me. And such a favourite as Miss Mordaunt is, too!"

It was incomprehensible to Kate Little's reckless, foolish mind, bent on extracting every bit of pleasure she could.

And so Nesta Mordaunt came to know Cecil Monroe; and while he, boy-like, fell desperately in love at first sight, the strange feeling of interest that had sprung up in *her* heart, strengthened and rooted itself. Nor was Katie left out in the cold, although Nesta extracted from her a promise that she would not try to persuade him again to attend the theatre without Dr. Curlew's permission. And when the lad announced his intention of letting himself down by a rope from his bedroom window after the master had been his rounds, and taken the lights away, she

suppressed a smile, and told him how foolish such a proceeding would be, and how it would inevitably lead to discovery, and bring him into disgrace; and, strange to say, Cecil yielded, and gave his word that he would attempt no such thing. He had an immense respect and reverence for Miss Mordaunt, that Katie's merry, boisterous manners and familiar tones could never have inspired him with; and by and by, he grew to care less and less for Katie's society, and attached himself more and more to Nesta.

But after her acquaintance with Cecil Monroe, the actress grew more sad and subdued than ever, for, from his unconscious tongue, she gleaned far more about her lover's home and surroundings than she had ever learned from his lips. She could picture to herself his father, learned and clever, wrapped up in his musty folios, and thick unreadable tomes; and his mother, gentle and lady-like, but with a certain dignity about her that was

quite unapproachable, save by her own class, one who would not deem it possible that *her* son could marry beneath him. Was not his father a Monroe, of Monroe Park, and had not she been a Montmorency? Well could the girl's vivid imagination picture it all, and her heart sank within her at the sorry prospect the future presented. Was it likely that they would receive Miss Mordaunt, the actress, as their son's bride? Nay; and *this* thought was tinctured by a still greater sorrow and apprehension—was it even possible that that son should really wish it himself?

And then she would chide herself for her distrust, pressing her lips to the coral hoop which had never left her finger since the night when he had placed it there with loving words and fond caresses. Oh, how long ago it seemed now; and his letters were so cold and insufficient to ease the dull ache of her heart. Sometimes she would feel as if she could not bear it any longer—longing to con-

vince herself, one way or the other, of his thoughts and feelings towards her; and then, shrinking back appalled at the gloomy gulf that must stretch across the years to come, did she release him from his vows, and he accept his freedom.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Take back the heart that thou gavest,
What is my anguish to thee?
Take back the freedom thou cravest,
Leaving the fetters to me!
Take back the vows thou hast spoken,
Fling them aside and be free,
Smile o'er each pitiful token,
Leaving the anguish to me."

It was very late before Miss Mordaunt appeared at the "Queen's" that evening. Her mother had not returned, and where she could have gone her daughter could not imagine, for she rarely, if ever, went by herself. She chided herself for her folly in feeling anxious, yet, at the same time, she could not help it, and she lingered until the last moment, and when she at length reached the theatre, she was a full quarter of an hour late.

But she was not destined to act that night. She had but just appeared on the stage, when a bustle at one of the side wings drew her attention, and arrested the words on her lips.

"I tell you, I *must* see her! I don't care where she is! and when she knows what I have come for, she will say I was quite right. Hands off—do you hear?" As some one strove to pull him away, the clear young voice was raised angrily,—"I tell you I *will* see Miss Mordaunt! Her mother is very ill."

With one bound, Nesta was by his side

"What is it? My mother!—oh take me to her!"

Cecil wriggled himself free of his captors.

"She is at home, Miss Mordaunt," he said, his face grave and sad. "She met with an accident, a cab-horse knocked her down, and—".

"Oh let me go to her;" and seizing a cloak, that some one had dropped, and wrapping it over her stage dress, she prepared to leave

the theatre at once. She never heard the manager's suave question, "How soon could she return?—What was to be done?" Little she recked whether there was any performance that night, or not, as she swept by the portly figure, smirking and bowing, for Mr. Roebuck was very civil to Miss Mordaunt.

It was but a few minutes' drive, and they were soon rattling over the stones. The hall door was open, and when the girl sprang out, and would have hurried up stairs, a gentleman standing in the hall refused to let her pass.

"No one must see the poor lady, at present," he said courteously, but firmly.

"But I am her daughter," she cried, with feverish energy—"and I *must* see her. Oh, for God's sake, let me pass."

The beautiful white face, with its agonized expression, only strengthened the doctor in his resolution.

He knew it could do no good. Mrs. Mor-

daunt was dead, and the scene up stairs was not for a delicate, loving woman to look upon.

He drew her into the drawing room, and began relating particulars of the accident, but she did not seem to hear him, she could not listen, she only fixed her eyes on him, saying from time to time, imploringly, "Oh, let me go to her!" Then, a dull thud on the floor above sent a cold chill to her heart, and she sprang up excitedly. "What are they doing to her? I *will* go!" fiercely darting to the door, and before Dr. Chalmers could prevent her, she was half way up the stairs. But her mother's door was locked, and although she shook it in frantic efforts to enter, she was baffled. Then she put her ear to the key-hole, and could distinguish the low murmur of voices from within. A sudden horrible conviction swept over her, and with a piercing cry of exceeding bitterness—"She is dead!" she fell insensible on the threshold.

* * * * * * *

On his own responsibility, Cecil took upon himself to telegraph for his brother, thereby calling down a stern reproof from Nugent.

"I should like to know what possessed you to do such a thing, Cecil?" he said, "it is the greatest piece of impudence I ever heard of."

"Dr. Chalmers said I was to let her friends know," returned the boy doggedly.

Nugent flashed a keen look of enquiry into the young face.

"And what made you suppose that *I* was such an especial friend of Miss Mordaunt's?" he asked.

Mindful of his promise, Cecil answered, "Why, Nugent, didn't you say you were her guardian, or something of the sort?" Mr. Monroe hesitated, wondering if he could have been so imprudent; he did not remember it, but he might very probably have said so, for the lad had annoyed him with questions about the actress more than once.

"No, I'm not her guardian," he said coldly.

"I knew her father very well, and the last time I ever saw him, he asked me to look after his wife and family. Poor fellow! he little thought that he would never come back to England again, and I have done what I could for the widow and her daughter ever since, out of a feeling of sincere regard for the father."

"Oh, I wonder if it was out of that same regard, that you made love to Nesta?" thought the boy. Aloud, he said, "Well, Nugent, you had better go up and see Miss Mordaunt, I guess, for she's awfully cut up, poor thing, and she hasn't a soul near her, except the landlady."

"Mind your own business, Cecil! that is quite enough for your limited capacity," said his brother sharply, "and don't interfere with what is no affair of yours. I shall go, or not go, to see Miss Mordaunt, just as I choose, and I think it a most confounded piece of impudence on your part, to telegraph for me! I thought you were awfully ill, or I shouldn't

have come over here in such a hurry, I can tell you."

This conversation took place in Dr. Curlew's study, where Mr. Monroe had been ushered on his arrival; and instead of the doctor's bald head, and white beard, which he expected to see, and a dolorous voice informing him of some frightful catastrophe, the door burst open, and in bounced Cecil himself, perfectly well to all appearance, and sound in limb. Mr. Monroe was more than a little annoyed. Above all things he was anxious that the boy should not discover his relations with Nesta, and considered it, as he had said, "a great piece of cheek" in his brother to have telegraphed in that summary way, which gave him no choice but to come at once, leaving important business, or, what he chose to think such, in the heat of the moment.

Now that he *was* here, perhaps he had better see Nesta. Poor girl! it must have been a terrible shock to her.

About six o'clock that same day, he rang

the bell at No. 3, Brunswick Terrace, where Nesta had rooms, and asked to see Miss Mordaunt.

The landlady looked at him from head to foot, surprise stealing over her face, at the request, for, "I never," as she confided to her husband, "knew how wery pertikler and respectable h'actresses was before, but as for Miss Mordaunt, I don't believe I ever h'opened the door to a gentleman wisitor of hers, all the time she's bin here." Evidently Mrs. Rodgers did not count Cecil Monroe as a gentleman! on the contrary, she was apt occasionally to, "drat that tiresome boy, acoming here with his muddy boots."

To her reply, that "Miss Mordaunt was that h'upset with trouble," she didn't think, "she could see no one," the gentleman took out his card, which Mrs. Rodgers daintily held in one corner of her apron, to preserve it from contact with her somewhat grimy fingers, and scrutinized as she went slowly upstairs.

"Mr. Monroe! oh! some relation of that blessed boy's, I should think!" nor did the quick blush on Nesta's cheek escape her keen eyes, as she said—

"Show the gentleman into the drawing room, Mrs. Rodgers, and I will come down directly."

And so, after long weeks of separation, Nesta and her lover stand face to face again. She is quiet and calm enough when she first enters the room, but at the first sound of his voice, she breaks down completely, covering her face with her hands, and sobbing piteously.

Nugent Monroe, like most men, detests a scene, and he feels so annoyed for the moment, that he is in two minds whether to take up his hat and go. But Nesta is a brave girl, she dries her tears, and looks up with a faint ghost of a smile coming over the sad face. In spite of himself, he feels bound to sympathise. She tells him the little she knows.

herself about her mother's accident, how she had gone out without saying where she was going, and how, some hours later, she was carried back insensible, or—poor Nesta broke off, "she might be dead then—I don't know! I only know that she is gone, and that I am all alone in the world."

Nugent Monroe did not say, as perhaps she fondly hoped he would, that she was not "alone," while *he* was living to protect, and do battle for her. His eyes were fixed on the hat he held, and he made no reply. After a moment's pause, she continued—

"I—I can't tell you about it, but—they would not let me see her at first, she—she was frightfully cut about the face and head. I scarcely think I should have recognised her."

It was a sad recital, and the young man said awkwardly—

"Of course it is very dreadful, Nesta! very! but—but we must all be prepared for this kind of thing, you know."

She clasped her hands tightly, and looked away from him, but she made no manner of reply. She was yearning, poor forlorn child, for a word of love, for a ray of hope, to light up the dismal present, and glimmer over the uncertainty of the future. This meeting was so different to what she had expected it would be. Her whole heart had swelled within her, when she found that he had come to see her, and she had sung a little triumphant song, "He *does* love me, or he would not have come so speedily," but now that they are together, there is an awkwardness she does not understand, some obstacle that bars the way to anything like unreserved conversation and confidence, such as she has a right to expect, and she begins to wish that he had never come, for—

> "Oh, far worse than distance,
> Is the world that stands between."

The silence grows oppressive. Why does he not break it? At length he speaks—

"Nesta, I want to ask you a question. What does Cecil know of your affairs?"

"Of—of—" she said, hesitatingly.

"What does he know of you and me?"

"He—" she blushes painfully, "Nugent, you must not be vexed, but he guessed, one day when we were talking—"

"Guessed? guessed what?"

"That we were engaged!"

"And you acknowledged it?"

She bowed her head.

"Oh, Nesta, how could you be so foolish? You do not know the irreparable harm you may have done! I did think that our secret was safe in your hands, but you are like all the rest of your sex; and good, and bright, and clever, though you are, you cannot keep a quiet tongue."

The injustice of his reproof stings her to the quick.

"You have no right to be angry," she says, "I have kept my promise, and it was

quite by accident that your brother found it out."

The young man rose from his chair, and paced angrily up and down.

"Cecil, of all boys," he said, "if you know anything of him, you must see that he is the very last person to be entrusted with a secret."

"I am not afraid that he will ever speak of it," she began, but he interrupted her.

"Nesta, if by this folly my mother should come to hear of it, there would be an end of the whole thing at once!"

"Why?"

"Because—oh, because—you would not understand if I told you," he said, irritably.

She turned the ring she wore, round and round, and at length drew it slowly from her finger, holding it towards him.

"Am I to understand that you wish for your freedom?" she asked, proudly; "have you ceased to love me, Nugent?"

The white, sorrow-stricken face touches him.

"My dear little woman, don't be absurd," he says, "it is for your good as well as mine that I explain this, for the future welfare of us both, that I am vexed that you should have been so inconsiderate as to let Cecil know of our engagement. And as for not loving you, why Nesta!" looking down on the sweet face, "you know I do, and that it is no fault of mine that I cannot marry you yet. Take back your ring, foolish child, and don't talk any more nonsense."

So the clouds were driven away once more, and the sunshine beamed forth again, and when Nugent Monroe said farewell to his *fiancée*, she was transformed into a new being. And as she closed the door after him, and slowly ascended the stairs, her eyes sparkled as they had not done for many a long day, with the reflected light of peace and tranquillity, and a mind at rest.

"Oh, I feel quite young again!" she said to herself.

"I declare, I never saw anyone so beautiful as Miss Mordaunt," announced the landlady to her husband, after receiving final instructions that night, "her face is for all the world like a h'angels. It's very plain to be seen, there is a some-think, between her and the young man as come this afternoon, and I, for one, wishes the poor thing well, for a quieter, and respectabler young woman never went into any body's house!"

So sovereign a power is love! so potent a charm does it possess to bring joy and comfort to the sorrowing spirit, so eloquent a touch to smooth the wrinkles into smiles, and to quench in brilliant sunlight, the doubts and tears that have well-nigh worn out the patient, anxious heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Sorrow must crop each passion-shoot,
And pain each lust infernal;
Or human life can bear no fruit,
To Life eternal."

"For angels wait on Providence,
And mark the sundered places,
To graft with gentlest instruments,
The heavenly graces."

From "Bitter Sweet."

One evening, when all unprepared for visitors, Mrs. Hazletine sat busily engaged on some work, she heard, to her surprise, voices in the hall, and Godfrey having told her that he should not be home to dinner, she wondered who it could be, and opened the door, to find her husband and Mr. Monroe.

Since the day on which, with bitter shame and mortification, Monica Hazletine read her

own heart's weakness, she had studiously avoided Nugent Monroe. He had dined there once only, and she had shrouded herself in such an impassive, stony composure, that even he was frozen by it, and had drawn forth a rebuke from her husband as to how she could act in such a tragedy-queen manner to his friends. She had need of praise, not blame, could he have known it, in denying herself the sweet pleasure of unreserved converse, but, all unconscious, he made her task the harder.

She cannot now refuse the out-stretched hand, but a belt of ice contracts her heart as his fingers close around her own.

Mr. Hazletine explains how he has missed the train that was to take him to a bachelor party, and finding that there was no other for more than an hour, had given up the idea of going, and on his homeward route, having fallen in with Mr. Monroe, had persuaded him to return with him.

Dinner passed off very well. Godfrey was in high spirits, and jested at the probability of their finding nothing in the house to eat, and expressing great astonishment, as the usual courses followed one another.

His wife laughed.

"I believe Mr. Hazletine thought that as he was not going to be at home, I intended to go without my dinner," she said, addressing herself to her visitor.

When the gentlemen joined her in the drawing room, she was standing by the open window that led into the garden.

"It is quite warm this evening," she said, making room for them beside her; "the moon is getting up. I love to watch it gleam across the grass and shimmer in among the trees."

"I never knew you to be poetical before, Monica," cried her husband, "certainly not since the days of our courtship."

"And yet," pursued Nugent Monroe,

"one would not suppose that in Mrs. Hazletine's life there had been sufficient discord to crush out the poetry in her nature."

"He could never have guessed how near the truth he was," thought Monica, sadly, "or he would scarcely have hazarded such a remark."

But glancing up hastily, she surprised a look on his handsome face, expressive of the deepest sympathy and compassion — nay, more! though she would not confess it even to herself, a certain tenderness and admiration lingered in the sleepy brown eyes.

No one made any response, and a stillness fell upon them, broken only by the faint ticking of the clocks within the room, and the subdued rustle of the leaves without.

"We only want one thing to make this complete," said Godfrey, at length, "and that is music."

"Well, as is rarely the case in this world, your wish is about to be realized," answered

his wife, "for I can see Janet Deane coming down the road." And turning to Mr. Monroe, "Janet is a harpist, and quite blind, poor girl," she said. "She lives in the village, and when the evenings are warm enough, her brother carries her harp, and she goes round to the different houses, and sings, and in that way earns quite a nice little sum of money. She has a wonderfully sweet voice, and every one is sorry for her. Yes, it is she, Godfrey, —do tell her to come in."

Mr. Hazletine bounded out of the window, and in a few moments the blind girl and her brother were seated on the greensward. But when after a few preliminary chords on her beloved harp, the blind girl commenced to sing, one, at least, of her auditors wished that she had chosen any other night than this, or any other song than "Strangers Yet."

What a curiously plaintive voice it was.

"Strangers yet! after years of life together,
After fair and stormy weather,
After travel in far lands,
After touch of wedded hands,
Why thus joined—why ever met?
If they must be—strangers yet."

"Will it ever more be thus,
Spirits still imperious,
Shall we never fairly stand,
Soul to soul, as hand to hand?
Are the bounds eternal set,
To retain us strangers yet?"

Oh! would nobody stop her? Must she listen to it all? Monica leant heavily back against the ruby curtains. Strangers yet! If Nugent Monroe had at any moment during his acquaintance with the beautiful Mrs. Hazletine doubted the evidence of his senses that she was unhappy, and taught himself to believe that her nature was a curiously restrained and passionless one, he was now, once, and for ever, undeceived. Not one tremor of the proud lips, not one flush of the pure face escaped him, and the moon shone down on the burnished golden head resting—

ah, me! so wearily against its dark background.

Nugent Monroe had to put a strong curb on himself, and force his rebellious pulses to slacken speed, and quench, as best he might, the fierce fire that burned in his heart for his friend's wife.

It was over at last, and as Godfrey moved towards the little group, the poor girl raised her sightless eyes, and listened with a keen pleasure to his few words of praise and thanks.

Had the blind girl's song touched him, too? Nugent Monroe thought so, for he was evidently unwilling for more music that night; and when the girl and her brother rose, he let them go, disregarding Janet's question, "Shall I sing anything else, Mr. Hazletine?"

The click of the gate woke Monica up to life again, for she had not moved since the song ceased, gazing out into the moonlit garden.

"It is growing chilly—come indoors, Monica. Why, how cold you are!" touching her hand, as he drew her within the room.

"It is nothing. I did not feel it, Godfrey," she made reply; and by the time the candles were lighted, and the shutters closed, and curtains drawn, Mr. Hazletine's wife was herself again, and there was no single trace on the serene brow of the mortal agony she had gone through.

There are few things that stir up the inmost feelings more than music. A never-to-be-forgotten waltz, perchance, or a heart-stirring ballad; a trick in the composition, a rythm in the strain, verily it is a trifle to bring on the surface long-forgotten joys and sorrows, and to rake from the ashes of the past long hidden pangs, and suffocating, heartrending memories.

At a concert in London, I once marked an old lady—she must have been eighty years or more—who sat with tears streaming down

her aged face, and in answer to an astonished query from a young girl of sixteen summers or so, who sat beside her, as to what ailed her, she answered, "They played that air sixty years ago at the Court Ball in Paris, when I was a girl. I met my husband for the first time that night. We listened to it together, and during the forty years we lived as man and wife, we always clasped hands when we heard it played, and looked into each other's eyes, and mutely told how dearly we loved each other. I never thought to hear it again on earth, my child, and I miss the clasp of my Donald's fingers."

After sixty years, the memory of her girlish joys, connected with that strain of melody, was as fresh as ever.

"Mrs. Hazletine, may I beg your acceptance of a box for the theatre at Friskneyye, on Thursday night? There is a splendid caste, and the piece will be worth seeing. Your husband has promised to go."

Nugent Monroe's voice could be soft as a woman's when he chose, and he did choose at that moment to speak in carefully modulated accents, looking the while straight into her beautiful eyes.

"Thank you," she said, with a slight hauteur. "I do not think I care much about theatres, Mr. Monroe, and it would be a long journey back here from Friskneyye after the performance. Godfrey will go, I'm sure, but for myself I must decline."

"Monica, how very absurd!" cried her husband, "not go? of course you will. It is the first time that 'A Fallen Star' has been put on the stage, and will be very well acted, I believe. Besides, you know the author, Mr. Emmerson; you remember meeting him at Forsyth's last summer? He will expect to be supported by his friends on such an occasion."

Monica smiled.

"I do not suppose Mr. Emmerson will ever

know that I am not there, or resent my non-appearance," she answered.

"But you will consent to come," pleaded Nugent Monroe, "indeed you must; you don't know what difficulty I have had in securing a box; every one is crazy to see this piece."

There was an ominous cloud gathering on Godfrey's brow. Monica did not dare to further anger him by refusing, so with a slight bend of her head, she allowed herself seemingly to be persuaded.

But after her husband and his guest had retired to the smoking room, thinking it over in her own heart, she resolved that, let the consequences be what they might, she would not yield. What, sit two, perhaps three hours, side by side with Nugent Monroe, thrilled with the music, intoxicated with the acting! Some women might do it, but not such natures as hers. If she had never known it before, she realized that evening,

that she could not play with fire and not be burned. At all risks she must find an excuse, and if that availed nothing, refuse point blank. Godrey could hardly force her to go. And she knew right well, that with her voluptuous nature, and her heart filled with scorned and repudiated love, did she dare to tamper with temptation, she would be lost.

Traversing the long corridors to her own room, she paused at the nursery door, turned the handle, and entered, closing it noiselessly after her. The little Marguerite lies sleeping in her cot. What a sight for a mother's eyes! flushed cheeks, tossed golden hair, dimpled elbows, tiny fingers. Passionately did Monica press her lips to the wee pink palms, crushing them against her breast, as if with their innocent, holy touch, she could still the wild tumult raging there. The babe sleeps calmly, smiling in its dreams, as the angels whisper to it. What had not she

lost? thought the poor mother, in her efforts to stifle the maternal impulses. Husband! child! and yet, surely, never was poor widow or childless parent more bereaved than she. It had been better for her had she neither than to possess the husk without the kernel.

"Will it ever more be thus,
Spirits still impervious?"

prayed the unhappy wife and mother.

Well did she know that even touch of wedded hands was powerless to draw husband and wife together, but surely there was a bond between child and parent that no woman could wholly resist.

"Bone of my bone; flesh of my flesh. Heaven help me, or my heart will break with its vast desolateness, and its hungry longings," murmured the poor storm-driven woman.

She was still awake, when, some two hours' later, Godfrey came up stairs.

"Monica, what can you mean by acting in

the absurd way you did to-night?" he said, angrily.

"I think it is a great deal too far to drive for the sake of a play," she answered, "we might as well go up to London at once."

"Pshaw! a mere subterfuge," he rejoined. "What has come over you, Monica? I confess I do not understand this reluctance to comply with every wish of mine; have you suddenly taken it into your head to retire from the world altogether? I never saw anyone so changed; I rarely speak to you now, but you anger me, and once it was so different."

"Yes," she answered, softly, "so different."

Her tone nettled him.

"Am I never to cease being annoyed at you," he asked again, "is it always to go on in this way, first one thing, and then another? I never knew before I married in how many ways a woman can make herself detestable to her husband."

The tightly compressed lips were the only

sign his wife gave that she heard him; and, still more wrathful at her silence, he continued—

"In the first days of our marriage, you were fretful and exigeant—"

She interrupted him with a curious smile, tender at the recollection, scornful at the mockery the past had grown to be to her now.

"You are right," she said; "fretful and exigeant I suppose I was. I know I used to weep when you left me, and count the hours until you returned. I could not bear your absence then—only think of it now;" with a discordant laugh. "I was wretched without you—I watched for your coming—I loved to sit on your knee, and twine my fingers among your curly hair—to lay my cheek to yours—to feel your heart's quick beats against my own—to nestle in your arms; fancy! Was I not a fool to make such trifles my paradise? But that day has gone

by, and even you, Godfrey, unreasonable as you are, can no longer taunt me with burdening you with caresses, overwhelming you with my love! Yet, husband, did you know how, in moulding me into your notion of an orthodox wife, you have succeeded in crushing out every spark of affection for you in my breast, perhaps you might pause, and ask yourself if it were a wise thing to do."

He is roused in right good earnest now. Softened by the passionless ring of what was worse than sorrow in her tone—a calm indifference, he tries to speak, but his voice is husky and choked.

"I did not mean to treat you to a display of heroics," she says presently.

Still he does not speak. Never through the years of their wedded life has Godfrey Hazletine been so truly himself as at this moment, when courtesy, society, all swept away he feels and sees that he has made a great mistake, and hungers to take her to his

heart again, and bid her love him in her own way—how and in what manner she wills, so she does, in all verity, love him.

"You are vexed with me," she asks again, and he answers her slowly—

"No; I suppose you only said what was true."

Even for the dear hope of fanning the weak flame of her love into flickering warmth and life again, she cannot deny that it is all as she has said, and that in very truth her heart seems shorn of all, save wifely obedience to her lord.

"Where was the love gone," she pondered sadly, "could it really have been true love—the love that one reads of, hears of, and once in a thousand years meets with—pure and solemn and holy; that it should have melted away in three short years, under a few harsh words, and scornful reminders of her dignity as a married woman? No," she says, softly, "it could not have been love, for love is infinite."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Alas! we two, we two! thou say'st
Aye, one thou wast with me,
That once of old. But shall God lift,
To endless unity.
The soul, whose likeness with thy soul,
Was but its love for thee."

ROSSETTI.

"If you please, Miss Hargrave, I was to give you this. There is a little boy in the kitchen, waiting for an answer."

Judith hurriedly broke the seal, and read the few lines the note contained, conscious that the squire's keen eyes were fixed on her scrutinizingly.

"Well," she remarked, carelessly, "the impudence of these workpeople passes all bounds."

"What is it?" asked her cousin, looking up from his book.

"'Mrs. Wilson' (the woman who made my ball-dress) 'will be much obliged to Miss Hargrave if she will settle her account, as she has a bill to meet on the 14th inst.'"

"I cannot say I see any great degree of impertinence in that," said the young man, nonchalantly, "the poor woman has earned her money, and in my idea has a right to be paid."

"Oh, we all know Mr. Harry Trevellian's philanthropic feelings," said the girl, saucily, as she rose to leave the room, with the note tightly grasped between her fingers.

Outside the door she held her breath and listened, but not a sound broke the stillness within. Had the squire been in the slightest degree suspicious, he would assuredly have confided his doubts to his son; but no, he has resumed his broken slumber, and all is still. So far, so good. To run quickly

up stairs, seize her writing-desk, and scribble a line, was the work of a moment, and then she rang for her maid, and bade her deliver it at once to the boy. She might have casually mentioned the fact that it was a claim for money, but something in Fanny's face caused her to hesitate. Could she trust the girl?

"Do you know who the lad is?" she asked.

Fanny's answer re-assured her.

"No, I don't, Miss. I rather fancy he is a Binbrook lad."

"Well, Fanny, give him that note, and tell him to go at once. I don't want the kitchen filled with errand boys."

Fanny departed on her mission, turning the letter over and over in her hand, but she did not glean much from the proceeding, for it was undirected; but she had the curiosity to ask the boy who he was, and where he came from?

"I am errand boy at the 'Thorn and Thistle,' mum," was the reply.

"And who sent you with that note?" questioned Fanny, her surprise being greater than her discretion, for she knew that the "Thorn and Thistle" was a small inn, fully five miles from Leverton, and whatever Miss Hargrave could have to do with messages from such a place puzzled her not a little. But she was foiled. The lad was evidently well-trained, for demurely remarking—"Them knows as sent me," he touched his cap, and grinning from ear to ear, went on his way.

"An impertinent young jackanapes," was the lady's maid's soliloquy, as she closed the door!

May was a strangely beautiful month that year. Summer seemed to have stolen a march for once in a way, and was bent on jostling her elder sister Spring.

Leverton Hall stood on a slight summit, and at one side of the house the grounds sloped gradually down to a knoll covered all over with a prickly gorse and pinky heather.

This was never a favourite walk with Mr. Trevellian's niece. Her temperament was too luxurious to find any pleasure in picking her way through brambles and briars. And yet on the same evening, some hour or two later than the events just narrated, the watcher might have seen her wending her steps in that direction.

"It is too hot for anything," she had announced, standing by the large bay window, almost the only modern thing in the old-fashioned dining room. "I shall have a sick headache if I stay indoors any longer. I am going out for a stroll."

Harry, who was present, did not offer to accompany her, and at any other time the omission would have roused her ire, but for once the young lady had other and more engrossing thoughts. Mr. Trevellian moved uneasily as she left the room.

"I don't like that girl to go out alone," he said.

"I should think she was fully capable of taking care of herself," responded his son, dryly.

They were sitting over their dessert, and while the Squire poured out a glass of the rich red wine, he drew a dish of raisins and almonds to him, and leisurely proceeded to crack the nuts.

"When I was a young man I didn't let the girls go gadding about by themselves," said the Squire.

Harry looked amused.

"I am not much of a beau," he said, "but I scarcely think, father, that you can accuse me of not being attentive to my cousin."

"No, no." The old man nodded his head violently—"but there's not much praise due either, eh, lad? Monstrous fine girl, isn't she?"

"Who? Judith? Yes; a trifle too coarse, perhaps, for actual beauty."

"But you can't have everything, can you,

Hal?" returned his father in high glee. "Well, now, and when is it to be? When are you and pretty Judith going to make the old man happy—eh?"

"Never," cried Harry, "if by making you happy you mean marrying! Never, sir, never. Surely you have not been making that mistake all this time?" despairingly.

A vicious look stole over the thin, cruel mouth.

"You mean to say you don't intend to make Judith your wife?"

"My dear sir, I should almost as soon think of marrying Fanny. I do not know which would be the most unsuited match."

"Then, if my niece is not good enough for you, you may marry whom you choose and look elsewhere for your fortune, for not one acre of this estate shall come to you, not one stone of this house, not one copper out of my coffers—do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I understand!" There was

something very noble in the young man's face, as he rose from his chair, standing erect and firm. "I understand that henceforth I have no home and no father, because I have dared to love a beautiful, penniless girl. Well, her love is worth the buying, even with so heavy a ransom. Good-bye, father, perhaps I had better go out into the world, and try to make my way there."

"Harry!—boy! don't leave me!" Never before had the Squire been heard to speak so gently. Was it his son's fearless demeanour that had touched the grim old lion, or did he think, by appealing to his affection, to soften him?

"I would not leave you, sir, if I did not feel that it would be for the best. I gave up what you demanded of me the last time we discussed this matter, but the thing you now ask of me is impossible."

"Well, well—let it be! I will say no more about it now. Stay at home, lad, and do your

best to fulfil the old man's wishes, and by-and-by we will talk it over again."

Harry was much moved at the sight of his father's unwonted weakness. Truth to tell, he had not thought that there was so tender a fibre in the tough old heart, and he held his peace, although he knew that months and years would make no difference in his resolve.

Meanwhile, where is Judith herself? Sauntering slowly while in sight of the Hall, and quickening her pace almost into a run when fairly beyond every point of observation. Up the steep knoll she climbs, scratching her boots, and slipping back twenty times in the ascent, plunging her hands into the prickly bushes to save herself from falling, much to the detriment of the grey kid gloves she wears. Will she never reach the other side? A few last panting, tired steps, and she treads on smooth grass once more, as the clock from Leverton steeple sounds the curfew. Taking off her broad-brimmed hat, she fans herself

with it, disgusted at the heat engendered by her scramble. She need not have feared, if her aim was to look her best, for, perhaps, she had never appeared so bewitching as now, when she throws herself on the short turf, and pushes the dark hair off her temples. There is something of the gipsy about Judith! The swarthy complexion, glowing cheek, and brilliant lips; and her coquettish manners, free from the polish a deeper insight into society would have bestowed, had also something of the Bohemian.

Presently she springs up, and greets, with outstretched hands, a tall and somewhat ungainly figure, coming slowly along.

"You have come then, Judith!" He seems wholly unprepared for the loving glances and demonstrative affection the young lady exhibits, and for the *empressement* thrown into the few words, "*Indeed* I have, Frank! I thought the time would never pass, until I could slip away."

"Well," remarks the young fellow, looking into the blooming face, lifted innocently to his, "I quite agree with the man, whoever he was, who said, 'women were kittle cattle,' for I'm bothered if I can understand you, Judith." Small blame to Frank Allington if he did not, for it was an even question, whether his *fiancée* understood herself.

"You have been very cross with me," she pouts, pushing a little stick that lies on the ground backwards and forwards with her foot. "I never thought you could be so unkind."

"Didn't it ever strike you that I had some little cause for complaint, Judith?"

"No," she answers defiantly.

"Listen to me, my dear girl," taking her hands in his, and forcing her restless eyes to meet his own. "When you left Clapham—it was as my affianced wife; is it not so?"

"Yes," she assents, tearfully, striving to free her hands, and wriggle herself out of his

hold. "Did you ever glance at the responsibility such a position entailed?" was the next question.

"Yes—No—I don't know—Let me go, Frank! You hurt me. If you mean that I ought to have written to you, I know I ought; but I never have any time, and I—I hate writing so." He releases her.

"I think you might have found a few moment's leisure during four months, Judith, if you had really cared to do it. Pleasure and duty were not one and the same thing—confess, dear!"

But she stands, swinging her hat round and round, and looking away from him over the knoll, where she can descrie the chimney pots belonging to the Hall.

"There is another reason, too," he continues, gravely. "You are encouraging the attentions of your cousin. Now, Judith, I sent for you here to answer me a question. Not, as you may have judged, 'Why you did

not write to me?' but, in what position you stand to that young man. And I mean to have an answer, and a true one."

She quails.

"I should not tell you anything but the truth," she answers doggedly. "I have nothing to do with Harry; he is very kind to me—that is all."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are not carrying on a flirtation with him? Be true, Judith, at least; if you are inconstant, speak the truth."

But it was not in her nature to be true, when blame attached itself to her; and she cried angrily—"Why do you say such things, Frank? You know I am engaged to you, and you ought to trust me. I could not say such things to you, because I love you!" Her voice broke down. What man could resist her? Not Frank! He caught her to him, and kissed the tear-gemmed lids and flushed crimson cheeks, and by dint of

much petting Judith consented to recover her equanimity; and before that interview was over Frank Allington was more hopelessly entangled in the toils than ever. Judith was by no means willing that her lover should escape her until she knew what her position at the Hall would eventually be; and of late she had had misgivings on the subject. His prospects were bright enough to warrant her holding him to his word. Time enough to bid him farewell when a wealthier suitor was at her feet; so by means of numerous womanly artifices and wiles she smoothed his ruffled feelings, and calmed his fears.

"And you will return to Clapham to-morrow?" she asked, for it was somewhat dangerous that he should remain in the vicinity.

"Yes, to-morrow at mid-day," he replied, dolefully; "I wish I could see you again, Judith."

"But that can't be," responded the damsel.

"Every minute of my time is occupied in a morning."

"Perhaps I might stay until evening, and catch the mail!"

"Oh, no," she said eagerly. "I generally read the newspaper, or play at chess with uncle, in the evening, and I am sure I could not manage to slip out unobserved two nights together."

"Well, good-by," said the young man reluctantly. "Remember, Judith, you will write once a week, or I shall come down to Leverton to find out the reason."

"I will write, never fear," answered his *fiancée*, registering a vow that if his coming down there again depended on *that*, she would take very good care not to miss the weekly budget. "It will be *my* turn next to pay you a visit," laughingly; "I shall come to Clapham to see mother pretty soon, and you can meet me there." With this vague promise of a future delight, the young

man bid her farewell; and as his warm kisses fell on her lips a faint tinge of compunction stirred the vain, intriguing little heart; and as she listened to his loving words something within whispered that she must take heed lest she mistook the shadow for the substance. She trudged homeward by the road, determined not to trust herself to the scant civilities of that dreadful knoll again. Mightily triumphant was Miss Judith Hargrave that night, telling herself again and again that she had successfully played the card which was destined to be the most troublesome in the pack.

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